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DONNA TERESA



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Donna Teresa

BY

FRANCES MARY PEARD

AUTHOR OF

'CONTRADICTIONS,' 'AN INTERLOPER,' 'THE CAREER OF CLAUDIA,' ETC.

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CHAPTER I

IT was sirocco in Rome; sirocco which, as every one knows, brings out a damp ooze on the pavement, and makes the hills yet more slippery for the overladen horses and mules; sirocco which disposes man and woman to take peevish views of life, especially if they have no work on which to fasten thought; sirocco, in fine, hot, baleful, depressing, sapping the strength of one and the energy of another, a universal excuse for whatever untoward may befall a Roman on the days when it makes itself felt.

In spite of this languor, however, the young Marchesa di Sant' Eustachio,

and her sister Sylvia Brodrick, were walking briskly along the street which, broken into three names and many hills, stretches the long distance from the end of the Pincio to the foot of Santa Maria Maggiore. There was little likeness between the sisters, in spite of strangers asserting that it was to be found. The marchesa, or Donna Teresa as she preferred to be called—for although no such title, as a title, actually exists, it is given by courtesy to Italian women of rank in place of the ‘signora’—was in mourning, and her face, while intelligent, was not beautiful. But Sylvia’s almost deserved the word. A critical observer might have taken exception to a certain absence of variety, a want of play about the pretty features ; that allowed for, the most grudging would have been unable to deny that the features in themselves were charming, and the colouring delightful. Her dress was absolutely neat, though there was

nothing in it particularly to admire, and perhaps something inharmonious in the lines.

Donna Teresa was the talker, and as she was in the best of spirits, her talk was eager, and she laughed at small things which would have scarcely amused her unless she held some inward cause for rejoicing. She laughed at the placards on the walls, at the gold-fish in their bowls. There was not an old stone built into a wall, not a bright cavern of vegetables, not a chestnut roaster stooping over his rusty tripod and quickening dull embers with fan of turkey feathers, but she noticed, and pointed them out gaily. Sirocco might blow, she cared nothing. For the first time since she became a woman, she was rejoicing in the breeziness of freedom, the bliss of living her own life, of forming plans, and of carrying them out with no one to say her nay.

She had been very young — too

young—when she met the marchese at Florence, and, unfortunately, insisted upon marrying him. Three miserable years followed, he being disappointed in two matters, the amount of her fortune, and the recoil which she experienced from his religion. As for her, she was disappointed in everything, and shocked in a great deal, so that when he unexpectedly died, she felt rather relief than grief. Then she blamed herself for the sensation, and in one of the moments of rash remorse to which she was always liable, offered to remain at Florence with the marchesa, his mother. The old lady had been fairly kind to her, and Teresa had a notion that if she had been a more forbearing wife, her husband might have been a better man. Whether the idea were true or mistaken, it haunted her, and gave her two more years, if not of such acute misery, at any rate of a bondage irksome beyond words. The old marchesa

had been a power in her youth, and in age ruled her house as once she had ruled society, caring for no visitors except priests, treating Teresa as a lost heretic ; untidy, unpunctual, and recognising neither right of solitude nor cultivation of gifts in her daughter-in-law.

How long the girl—for she was still little more in years—would have continued to reproach herself and to endure, is difficult to decide, but it is certain that by the end of the years her first exalted ideas of expiation had lost freshness and strength, and were taking refuge in obstinacy. Happily, for her, two things came about. Her brother-in-law, the marchesa's second son, developed a passion for travel, and his wife and children were ready and anxious to make the Palazzo Sant'Eustachio their home. At the same time Teresa heard that her grandmother and sister were coming for the

winter to Rome, and wanted her to join them. She jumped at the opportunity, had a stormy interview with the old marchesa, left Florence, as she hoped, for ever, and renouncing palaces and the threadbare state belonging to an impoverished family, found herself, to her unbounded joy, in a small apartment in Rome with her grandmother and sister.

They were all poor together, and their apartment had no pretensions to grandeur ; but Teresa, whose artistic longings had been cramped and even smothered in her Florentine rooms, was wild with joy at finding herself able to pull the furniture about as she pleased, and to surround herself with flowers, books, and pictures at will. Her energy leapt to life again, and her companions were content to allow her to exercise it as actively as she chose. She was a beneficent housekeeper, for she walked long distances to get the best salad, the

best cream, or the best maritzzi. She scolded Nina, the good-natured careless untidy servant, who adored her ; she dusted books, bargained, painted, and insisted upon her sister seeing Rome and Roman functions conscientiously. It was with this aim that she was conducting her to the church of San Martino in Monte, that day in festa.

The difference between the two sisters became more marked as they walked along the pavement, and now it was to the advantage of Teresa, for she carried herself with a light grace which was yet firm and decided, while Sylvia wavered, and seldom knew on which side to pass the people she met. Teresa's face, again, changed expression rapidly, and when she spoke was lit with eager interest, while Sylvia's remained placid, and if at times her eye became anxious, it never brightened. Still, she was unusually pretty. She adored Teresa without in the least understanding her,

and her mind lumbered heavily after the freakish darts of imagination in which this other—who had suffered enough to crush a less elastic nature—revelled. Generally Sylvia was unconscious that she did not understand, but there were times when a remark of Teresa's, flung and forgotten, would leave her painfully struggling to catch its hidden meaning, so that her very affection kept her as it were on the strain of tiptoe.

When they had passed the heavy leathern curtain at the door of San Martino, raised for them by one of the many clamorous beggars who rattled their tins outside, they saw the large church crowded with such a shuffling and shifting throng, that it was difficult to find standing-room except at the back or in the aisles, and Donna Teresa was obliged to skirt the congregation and pilot her less capable sister until they reached the steps leading to the

choir, where, although there was no seat, they could lean against a pillar for support, and, as Sylvia thankfully reflected, thus avoid contact with the children, whose dirt and rags left her quite indifferent to the splendour of their eyes, and to a certain unkempt artistic force. Such a crowd as filled San Martino was incomparably more picturesque than the straight rows of worshippers in an English church. Some stood, some sat, at intervals all knelt; and the broken headline, the strong contrasts, the columns and dim distances, the splashes of vivid colour sharply accentuated against a somewhat misty background, the faces, often remarkable and seldom insignificant, gave Donna Teresa, well accustomed as she was to such sights, an immediate gratification. Sylvia, meanwhile, concentrated her full attention upon the function. A cardinal officiated, and a group of priests were assisting under

the direction of a short fat man, whose duty it was to instruct each what he should do—to pull one and push another into place, to whisper how the book was to be held, to indicate to the cardinal where he should read, to show the boy-server where to stand for the censing, and when to hand the censer to the cardinal; at all these varied movements Sylvia Brodrick stared with a riveted attention which assured her sister that she was interested. She was, therefore, the more amazed when Sylvia turned upon her with a whisper which was almost a cry—

‘Let us go! Please let us go! I can’t bear it!’

Donna Teresa was always prompt. She immediately edged her way out, asking no questions until they reached more open space at the end of the church, where her quick eye caught sight of a vacant chair.

'Sit down, Sylvia. What is the matter? Are you ill?'

The other shook her head.

'I couldn't stay, it was too dreadful!'

She spoke in a frightened voice, and Teresa flung a hasty glance round to see what had alarmed her.

'Do tell me,' she said encouragingly.

'Oh, all,' said Sylvia sighing. 'That cardinal sitting on a stool like a red idol, having his clothes pulled about and arranged, and that little fat man. All!'

Teresa was half relieved, half provoked.

'Was that it?' she said, raising her eyebrows. 'I thought you were interested.'

'I couldn't bear it,' said Sylvia dolorously. 'But if you really like to stay, I can go home by myself of course.'

Donna Teresa scarcely heard the words; her vigorous, somewhat impatient personality found itself every

now and then brought up suddenly and unexpectedly against what could only be compared to a dead wall in her sister's nature. She resented it, and then, as usual, smitten with remorse, and acknowledging some emotion which she was sure was more delicate and subtle than her own, began impetuously to carry out Sylvia's wishes.

'Dear, we will go together,' she said, 'only I am afraid we must get back to the big entrance. You needn't look at poor Cardinal Simone, you know,' she added, her smile broadening as she noticed that Sylvia was indeed keeping her head carefully turned in an opposite direction. The sisters were only able to make slow way, for the throng was thick, and Teresa could never help becoming alertly interested in what was about her. She moved on, however, determinedly, until, when pushing out the heavy leatheren door-pad, a man jostled her rudely, passed, and ran down

the steps. Teresa, sure of what had happened to her, cried, 'Oh !' and felt for her purse. It was gone. She exclaimed hastily to Sylvia, 'There is Mrs. Scott, join her,' and flew after the thief, who was already out of sight.

By the time she reached the corner he was not far away, and her light steps quickly overtook him. He glanced over his shoulder, hesitated, and when she exclaimed indignantly, 'You have my purse !' held it out silently. Teresa caught it, but hers was not a nature to let wrong-doing go free, and she promptly appealed to the bystanders. A crowd in Rome will gather with inconceivable swiftness, so that in a moment a dozen persons were hanging round, by no means actively engaged in assisting law and order, rather, indeed, sympathising with the other side, but sufficiently amused and curious to see what would come of this accusation by a young and solitary lady, to put, for the moment, a

few apparently undesigned obstacles in the way of escape. These would have soon vanished if two municipal guardie had not unexpectedly found themselves where they were wanted, and to them with instinctive though often disappointed confidence, Teresa breathlessly appealed.

'This man has just stolen my purse as I came out from San Martino,' she said.

'But the signorina holds it,' returned one of the guardie, glancing at it indifferently.

'As you see,' broke in the young man violently. 'I pick up this devil of a purse in the church, the signorina pursues, I hand it to her at once, and this is how she repays me ! *Ecco!*' and he opened his hands and looked round insolently. Teresa was becoming more angry.

'He gave it to me—yes ! But it is probable he first emptied it. As you

see,' she added in her turn, holding it out after brief examination.

'Signorina——' the guardia began again, shrugging his shoulders.

She stopped him haughtily—

'The Marchesa di Sant' Eustachio, if you please.'

The mention of her name caused a visible stir of interest, and the police looked uneasy. The one who had not spoken drew her on one side.

'Eccellenza,' he said civilly, 'it is all doubtless as you say ; but, permit me, had you anything in your purse which you could identify ?'

'I had next to nothing. Four or five lire, perhaps. But how can you doubt, when it is so perfectly clear ?'

'A hundred pardons, eccellenza ; it is a great pity you did not catch him in the act. Then——! As it is—you heard his story—who knows ?'

And he also spread his hands.

By this time Teresa was pale, and

very angry indeed, for she saw that the guardie were afraid.

'If you let him go,' she remarked quietly, 'I shall certainly report you.'

The officer still hesitated, and the situation was becoming embarrassing, when a man's voice said in English—

'Can I be of any use?'

The marchesa turned impetuously.

'Oh, Mr. Wilbraham, I am so glad to see you! Please back me up.'

'Of course, of course,' said Wilbraham hastily. 'Let me first get you out of this crowd,' he added, looking round him with an Englishman's horror of anything approaching to a scene.

'Not yet,' said Teresa. 'That man took my purse in the most bare-faced manner, and they are evidently afraid of him, and inclined to let him go.'

'I'll see to it, only let me put you into a cab.'

'Thank you,' she was beginning

stiffly, when the guardia once more came to her side.

‘With your excellency’s permission we will take his name and address, and keep him under supervision. We can then lay our hands upon him if required.’

‘It is not likely that he will give you the right particulars,’ said Donna Teresa scornfully.

‘Eccellenza, it is a mere form. He is very well known.’

‘As you please. I cannot oblige you to do your duty, only you must understand that I shall complain to the questura.’

She turned sharply away, without flinging a glance upon Wilbraham, but when she had gone a few yards she heard one woman say to another—

‘Ah, they would not arrest him—not they !’

Teresa stopped.

‘Who is he ?’

The woman hesitated.

‘Eh, madama ?’

‘So you are afraid, too !’ said Teresa imperiously. ‘Don’t you see it is over ?’

The second woman, who was younger, broke in with an expressive gesture.

‘Eh, that it true ! It is over, poor fellow, thanks to the Madonna ! As for who he is, he is the Cesare who shot his sister a little while ago.’

‘His sister !’ repeated Donna Teresa, shocked. ‘Do you mean that he murdered her ?’

‘Murdered ! *ma che !*’ said the woman indignantly. ‘He loved her. He was an excellent brother. As for her’—she shrugged her shoulders—‘she was no good, and would not listen, so he shot her—and him. Only, unluckily, *he* was not killed.’

Teresa, feeling that she was suddenly rubbing shoulders with a tragedy, had

forgotten her own annoyance and herself. She asked quickly—

‘But why was not this Cesare punished?’

‘For what, madama? He was an excellent brother.’

‘And my husband said they made the court ring when he was acquitted,’ chimed in the second woman.

‘There was a momentary silence before Teresa became aware of a voice at her elbow—

‘Hadn’t we better——’

‘Why does he pick pockets? Is he so poor?’ she demanded abruptly, paying no attention.

‘Oh, it was not he, madama,’ said the younger woman, with a laugh; ‘it was not he. Probably he picked it up; what did he say? As for being poor —yes. But he would not steal, not Cesare!’

Donna Teresa, asking no more questions, walked, frowning, towards the

church. Wilbraham, relieved that this part of the episode was ended, remarked—

‘You won’t find Miss Brodrick.’

She stopped with a laugh.

‘I had forgotten. I suppose I was walking mechanically. Where is she then?’

‘She drove away with a lady, and asked me to look after you. I wish I had reached you a little earlier.’

‘Oh, it did well enough,’ said the marchesa absently.

‘I hope you didn’t lose much?’

‘What you would call nothing. I ought to have been more careful, for the churches swarm with pickpockets, and the police are quite useless, as you saw.’

‘Well, certainly they couldn’t be called energetic.’

‘I thought you took their view of the case?’ But the instant she had shot her little dart she looked at him,

and laughed frankly again. ‘Perhaps it was as well. Perhaps he didn’t take it, after all.’

‘I fancied you were quite sure?’

‘Oh—sure? You were all so lukewarm,’ retorted Teresa. ‘Besides, I have just heard his history. Not long ago he shot his sister.’

‘Accidentally?’

‘No; deliberately.’

‘The villain!’ said Wilbraham.
‘And is still unhung!’

‘Those women considered him a hero. I am afraid she wasn’t very nice.’

There was a silence, which he broke by saying—

‘I should think that had disposed of your scruples.’

‘I believe, on the contrary, it has set them going,’ said Donna Teresa, gazing reflectively at the ground. She exclaimed impetuously the next moment—‘Do you really believe that any man

who had shared in such an awful tragedy could go about the world picking pockets? Think what he must carry with him! Think what his thoughts must be! Though he was acquitted, it wasn't from any doubt that he did the deed. And even if he is able to persuade himself that he was right, he can't believe it always; there must be dark dreadful hours when her face comes between him and everything he looks at. At the best, to have been her executioner! I wish—oh, I do wish I had not felt so certain he was the man!

Her voice trembled slightly, and Wilbraham's face grew a little hard.

'I should expect the greater to include the less,' he returned shortly; 'and I wouldn't waste my compunctions if I were you.'

She glanced at him with a change of expression.

'You believe I was right in my first idea?'

‘Undoubtedly.’

She stopped.

‘Then what are you going to do?’

‘I’m off to the police office, the questura, or whatever you call it.’

‘Do you want me?’

‘Good heavens, no!’ exclaimed Wilbraham, who had just been congratulating himself on having got her out of the scrimmage.

‘Very well,’ she returned, looking at him with a smile he did not understand.

‘Then you must turn down that street.
But don’t be too hard on Cesare.’

CHAPTER II

DONNA TERESA walked thoughtfully along the Quattro Fontane. Had she been asked for her thoughts, she would have said they were wondering how Wilbraham, left to himself, would thread the difficulties of the questura, but, in truth, her mind was filled with problematic questionings as to Cesare and his character. Her eye, trained to observation, held his features pretty faithfully. He was young—probably no older than she herself—and pale, with a long face, drooping nose, and thin resolute jaw. The head was wide across the forehead, the brows reached closely towards each other, and between

them that slight wrinkle was already graven which usually comes only to older men. Teresa thought, and her thought hesitated. There rose within her, as there often rose, a vast pity for the poor of Italy, over-taxed, miserable, and sometimes desperate. Italy is not the only country where bribery and corruption help the rich, and leave the poor defenceless, but in other countries the effect is not, perhaps, as yet so apparent, and as yet there seems no such awakening of the national conscience as might give hope for the future. There is revolt seething in the lower classes, the revolt of misery. What is far more dangerous is the apparent absence of the sense of righteous justice in the upper. An upright man is apt to end by being kicked out of his department.

Teresa knew something of these matters ; her emotions were swift and impulsive ; she had many times been

reproached for them, and it was true that they had so often led her into pitfalls that she dreaded their guidance. This fear it was which gripped her when speaking to Wilbraham, and induced her to resign matters into his hand. He, she reflected, was a man, had common-sense—it looked out all over him—he had better do what he considered to be right, and she had better stand aside and let him do it. And yet if she were wrong?

She passed the great block of the Barberini, and the piazza with the Triton, went along the Sistina, and, turning up the Porta Pinciana hill, presently reached her own door. Neither entrance nor stairs were inviting, for the house was old, and had not kept pace with the general embellishment of Rome; but the porter, old also, made up in smiles what he wanted in tidiness, and now hastened to assure her that the signora and

signorina were both at home. Teresa was still grave as she climbed the weary stairs, but when she had turned the key of their flat, her face grew suddenly radiant. The wonder and joy of finding herself with her own people, the intimate delight of owning something which was, to all intents and purposes, home, the exhilaration of liberty, were as strong as, or stronger than, they had been in the first breathless moments of possession, strong enough to sweep all else out of her mind.

An old lady, very small and slight, sat in a low chair knitting. She had a charming face, sweet and yet shrewd, with clear blue eyes, a rose-blush complexion, and wavy white hair. As Teresa came in, she stretched out a welcoming hand.

'So here you are, my dear child,' she said. 'Sylvia is disturbed about you. Sylvia!'

The girl came hurriedly. Seen thus,

without her hat, she looked even prettier than before. The lines of her face were delicate, and there was an appealing expression in her eyes to which a man could scarcely be indifferent. She rushed to kiss her sister.

‘Oh, Teresa, I hope you did not mind ! I thought I ought to have stayed, but Mrs. Scott was certain you would rather I went with her, and Mr. Wilbraham said he would go after you, and—and—’

‘Suppose we hear what Teresa has to say ?’ put in Mrs. Brodrick drily.

‘Of course you were right to go,’ said the marchesa, smiling at her sister. ‘You could not have done any good by staying.’

‘Did you get your purse?’ demanded her grandmother.

‘Yes, I did—in a way. It was empty, though,’ added Teresa, sitting down and taking off her hat.

‘Then it was the man ?’

'I suppose so. I thought so. The police were as unsatisfactory as usual, and Mr. Wilbraham has gone to the questura to stir them up.' Her face darkened again, and she added inconsequently, 'I rather wish he hadn't.'

'Oh, let him,' returned her grandmother smiling. 'A thief ought to be punished.'

Teresa looked at her reflectively.

'I suppose so,' she repeated. 'Certainly he had the purse.'

'Proof enough, I should say.'

'Yes. Oh, he must have taken it,' she added quickly, with the air of one who was seeking confidence. 'But he is a man with a story. He shot his sister some little time ago. On purpose, if you understand.'

Sylvia cried out, but Mrs. Brodrick had lived a long life.

'That is very terrible,' she said gravely.

'Terrible. Granny'—Teresa knelt

by her grandmother's chair—‘you know things. Do you believe a man could do that, and afterwards go about the streets picking pockets ? He is young, remember. Could he ?’

Perhaps Mrs. Brodrick’s beliefs reached higher and lower than Teresa’s. She hesitated.

‘What did he say about it himself ?’

‘He said he picked up the purse in the church.’

‘Oh, but, Teresa—’ cried Sylvia, squeezing her hands together, and tripping over incoherent words, ‘he—yes—oh, he did ! Now I remember looking back just before we went out, and I saw a man stooping down and couldn’t think why. It was—yes, indeed, of course it was—that very man !’

Teresa turned pale. Naturally generous in all her thoughts and impulses, the dismal experiences of her life had added a more acute horror of

injustice than often belongs to women. She said in a low voice—

‘I must go to the questura instantly.’

‘Wait half an hour. You are so tired,’ urged Mrs. Brodrick. But the marchesa had sprung to her feet.

‘How can I?’ she cried impatiently. ‘I don’t know what steps Mr. Wilbraham may have taken ; but it is all my fault. I accused the man publicly, and have no right to keep him in that position a minute later than necessary. I wish I had left the horrid purse alone. His eyes have haunted me ever since.’

Mrs. Brodrick, slower to move, still looked doubtful.

‘I don’t like your going alone. People will talk.’

‘Let them !’ Donna Teresa drew herself up with a sudden hardening of her face. It softened again as she caught her grandmother’s look. ‘Dear, remember I am going to forget all about the marchesa. I have no children to

be hurt by what I do, and don't care the least little bit in the world for what may be said behind my back. But I care horribly for having made an unjust accusation, and it must be unsaid without delay.'

'Go, then,' said Mrs. Brodrick, smiling again. She added hesitatingly, 'You might take Sylvia.'

'Sylvia would not like it. I'll be extravagant and take a *botte* instead.'

'Here are English letters.'

'Oh, let them wait.'

She spoke from the door, and looked back to kiss her hand before running down the grey stone staircase, and calling one of the little open carriages with which Rome abounds. They are cheap enough, but she rarely indulged in such luxuries, for the marchese, her husband, had squandered what he could of her small fortune, and her grandmother's income was ridiculously inadequate to all that she contrived to do with it.

Just now, however, Teresa would not have begrimed a larger outlay, for she was on thorns at the idea of having committed an injustice. She searched the pavements anxiously for Wilbraham, but had gone down the crowded Tritone, and passed the Trevi, before she caught sight of him. She stopped the carriage, stepped out, and dismissed it, even at this moment amusedly conscious of Wilbraham's startled face.

'Well?' she asked quickly.

'I have done all that's necessary,' he answered with a touch of stiffness. 'I don't think there's anything more wanted. I worked them up to send to the man's house, and if he hasn't bolted, he'll be arrested.'

'Oh,' cried Teresa despairingly, 'then I am too late!'

'Too late? What for?'

'To spare him the disgrace. What he said was true—isn't it awful? Sylvia saw him pick up the purse, which, of

course, the real thief had thrown away. I am so sorry they have sent. Let us go at once.'

Wilbraham did not look pleased. He hated scenes, and still more hated women to be mixed up in them. There was no help for it, however, for Teresa was already walking rapidly in the direction from whence he had come, and of course he had to stick to her.

'They don't think much of your friend at the questura,' he said drily.

'All the more reason that we should see him through.'

Teresa's tone was uncompromising. Wilbraham half liked her for it, and was half provoked. It gave him a slightly malicious pleasure to find at the questura that all her fluent and impetuous Italian could not obviate the usual delay. Wilbraham felt it must be his duty to calm her, as she walked with an extraordinary swift grace up and down the

room in which they waited ; but his efforts failed, and evidently she was neither thinking of herself nor her companion. He, on his part, found it difficult to understand or sympathise with her extreme remorse. Cesare, with his excited, somewhat theatrical gestures, seemed to him a man who, if he had not committed one crime, was probably well up to the throat in others. The very reason which had awokened Teresa's compassion—that he had been the slayer of his sister—at once destroyed any germ of pity in Wilbraham's mind ; his theory of cause and effect being more direct and more of the nature of a sledge-hammer than Teresa's.

Shown into another room, the marchesa hurried eagerly to a gentleman who was sitting, and who rose courteously.

‘The Marchesa di Sant' Eustachio, I believe ?’ he said, glancing at the card in his hand. ‘You have come,

doubtless, eccellenza, about this affair of your purse ?'

'It was all a mistake. I have come to say how grieved I am,' began Teresa breathlessly. 'When I reached home my sister told me she had seen the man pick it up ; that was what he said. I am so very, very sorry that I did not believe him.'

The questor looked incredulous.

'She did not speak of this before, however ?'

'She had no time. I missed my purse and ran after him. When I reached home she told me. Pray, signore, do me the kindness to send one of your men to tell him that it was a mistake.'

'As to that, he is already here, marchesa. This gentleman'—he bowed to Wilbraham—'was desirous that no time should be lost, and my own view coincided with his.'

Teresa looked very unhappy.

‘ May I see him, then ? May I tell him how sorry I am ? Of course he can be released at once ? ’

‘ I regret to say that is impossible. He was violent and resisted my men. They were obliged to handcuff him, and even then he was troublesome. Believe me, that a night in a cell will cool his blood.’

‘ Oh ! ’ cried Teresa, squeezing her hands in distress, ‘ pray, pray let him go ! He was maddened by a false accusation.’

The other coughed significantly.

‘ Excuse me, marchesa,’ he said ; ‘ I could tell you a great deal about the fellow, which you do not know and would not guess.’

‘ I know,’ she said, ‘ that he is a most unhappy man.’

‘ He belongs to the advanced socialist party. He is dangerous.’

‘ I do not care whether he is dangerous or not,’ she returned indignantly,

for she was growing angry. ‘I supposed he was, as your men were so afraid of him. Being a socialist has nothing to do with it ; he is here because I accused him falsely, and I don’t wonder that he resisted. You would have done the same.’

The questor shrugged his shoulders stubbornly. Wilbraham believed that he was rejoiced to inflict a humiliation upon an enemy of law and order.

‘Possibly,’ he assented. ‘Nevertheless, he must be punished.’

Teresa changed her manner.

‘What will be the punishment?’ she asked.

‘If he did not take the purse, eccellenza, he will have the option of a fine or a few days’ detention.’

‘A fine? That might be paid to-day.’

‘To-morrow.’

‘But I will pay it. I am quite ready to pay it,’ she exclaimed eagerly. ‘Please let him go at once. You would oblige me very greatly.’

The magistrate waved his hand indulgently.

'It is absolutely impossible. The case cannot be dealt with so summarily. The signore will understand that certain formalities have to be gone through,' he added, appealing to the superior intelligence of the masculine mind.

'I think you'd better let it be as he says,' Wilbraham urged, anxious to get her out of the place. 'I'll be here to-morrow morning, and see it well through.'

Teresa might not have heard. She stood considering.

'If,' she said at last gravely—'if you really have not the power to release an innocent man——'

'Innocent possibly as to your purse, marchesa. But he assaulted my officers,' interrupted the questor, stung to retort. 'He deserves a heavier punishment.'

She made a slightly incredulous

gesture, but the next moment turned to him with a charming smile.

‘I am unreasonable, and you must forgive me, signore, because it was really all my fault. Will you treat him as leniently as possible, and tell me when I should be here?’

‘Perhaps before midday. Earlier? Who knows?’ He spread his hands and bowed. ‘I will do what I can.’

‘I will come at nine,’ said the young marchesa decidedly. ‘And pray let him know at once of my mistake. A thousand thanks.’

She drew herself up with a little touch of the great lady in her manner, which brought a greater deference into the official manner, and at the entrance repeated her intention of being there the next morning. As they walked away, Wilbraham again urged her to leave the matter with him.

‘Don’t you trust me?’ he asked,

wounded. ‘I assure you he shall have justice.’

‘He’s had nothing but the other thing so far,’ she said sharply. ‘Thank you. It’s perverse, I know, but I’d rather go myself.’

‘Perverse is no word for his opinion of me, granny,’ she was saying twenty minutes later. ‘The truth is I’m always wanting to shock him, and he yearns to call me “My dear young lady.” People who call you that are absolutely insufferable.’

Mrs. Brodrick glanced at her.

‘He has never said it.’

‘It’s on the tip of his tongue. Oh, there are the letters. Have you read them?’

‘Teresa!’

‘You might — you may! But I didn’t like the marchesa doing it.’

‘Ah, the marchesa seems to have often stepped off the path,’ said Mrs. Brodrick quietly. But her hand shook.

'It was for the good of my soul,' explained Teresa indifferently, 'and it did not much matter, because she could not understand English. What's this?' she added, taking a letter out of a long envelope, and turning it over.

'It looks as if it came from a lawyer.' Her grandmother's face changed. She saw that Teresa was staring blankly at the sheet, and she was instantly frightened, for, to her, lawyer's letters invariably preceded some loss of income. Presently Teresa looked up still blankly.

'I think,' she said, drawing a deep breath—'I think there must be some mistake.'

'Lawyers don't often make mistakes,' said Mrs. Brodrick gravely, after a momentary silence in which she braced herself. Teresa was staring at her now, and frowning.

'It is about Sir James Stanton——' she said in a slow changed voice.

'James Stanton!' Mrs. Brodrick caught both her wrists. 'He has left you something, Teresa! And I who thought it was bad news!'

'Yes, something.' She still spoke mechanically, and her grandmother was surprised at the effect upon her. The next moment she sprang up and flung open the bedroom door. 'Sylvia, Sylvia, come here! Come and listen, come and tell me I'm really awake'; but before her sister could answer, she was back and standing before Mrs. Brodrick, her hands clasped behind her, and her eyes beginning to shine. 'Granny, did I ever see him?'

'James? Never. He was your father's cousin. He knew your mother, too,' she added, with a keen glance and a smile of remembrance. 'And now!'

'Yes, now,' repeated Teresa, catching Sylvia by the waist. 'Now, guess.'

Mrs. Brodrick hesitated.

‘One mustn’t be greedy,’ she said.
‘It would be very nice for you if it were five hundred pounds.’

‘That is a good deal,’ said Teresa, looking queerly at her.

‘Yes, it is. Well, if it is only a hundred or two, it will be very useful. Teresa, what is it?’

For she saw that the young marchesa was trembling, and began to think that the matter must be more considerable than she had imagined.

‘He has left me a thousand a year,’ Teresa said in a very low voice. There was not a touch of triumph in it, but the thing was amazing because they were all unaccustomed to good fortune, and they simply stared at each other. Sylvia broke the silence—

‘A thousand a year! How rich you will be!’

‘How rich we shall all be!’ echoed Teresa in a gay unsteady voice.
‘Granny, every day of your life you

will go for a drive. No more thinking whether a fire is necessary or not, or how long a *passo* of wood will last. But do you believe it is quite true? Not a mistake of the lawyers?'

And for the first time in her life Mrs. Brodrick reflected thankfully that lawyers did not often make mistakes. She could not speak, but she thanked God silently.

'I don't understand it,' said Sylvia, laughing vaguely.

'Oh, nor do I! Don't let us try.'

'What will Nina say now?'

'Now—why?'

'Because she was so miserable about your purse. I think she was crying. She said,' Sylvia went on with a little awe, 'that she was sure you must have met a priest the first thing this morning, and didn't come back and wait for an hour as you should have done. And then it is Tuesday, which is always an unlucky day, don't you know?'

Teresa jumped up and ran to the door. ‘Nina !’

‘Eccellenza !’

A curious small bright-eyed woman appeared, with rough hair and not too tidy clothes. She came from Viterbo, and had a laugh for everything and sometimes a tear.

‘Why did you tell the signorina it was an unlucky day ?’

‘Eh-h-h-h-h-h !’ Nina’s ‘eh’ began on the fourth line, and ran down chromatically. Taken with outspread hands and raised shoulders it implied, ‘How can the signora ask, when she knows as well as I ?’ What she said was, ‘Did not the eccellenza lose her purse ?’

‘But I have had a much bigger one sent to me,’ said Teresa gravely.

‘Then, eccellenza, it is probable that after the priest you met a hunchback, and she might counteract. Besides—’ she hesitated—‘there is always that unfortunate Cesare.’

The marchesa was not surprised, Nina having an extraordinary knack of knowing whatever went on. But she was vexed at her thoughts being flung back upon a subject which gave her a miserable impression of having behaved ill without intending it.

‘What do you know about Cesare?’

Nina screwed her eyes together, and nodded her rough head.

‘See here, eccellenza, I should not mind knowing less. When one meets such in the street it is best to shut one’s eyes and walk on. If he has a temper or not! That poor Camilla! She was a butterfly, yes, and foolish, yes—but to be shot all in a minute, without a priest! What a brother!’

‘They say he loved her.’

‘Eh-h-h-h-h—h! So they say. They came from Sicily alone, these two, without parents, and he was strict with her, poor little baby, and so—! It was not a love I should have liked, but as

for stealing ! No, no, no, that is not Cesare.'

'Why did not the guardie say so, then ?' demanded Teresa impatiently.

'See, eccellenza, they are afraid, and they do not like him. He is hand and glove with the fiercest men in Rome, men who would overthrow anything, everything, king or pope, what you will ! Since Camilla died it is as if an evil spirit had entered into him—he keeps with those men, he never hears mass, he is like a lost soul. What took him into San Martino, I wonder ? At any rate I wish the eccellenza had had nothing to do with him,' Nina ended, uneasily.

And Teresa wished the same thing with all her heart. The young violent face, the passion of the eyes, haunted her. Her grandmother and sister were taken up with delight and wonderment over her good fortune. She tried to fling herself into it with them, but

while she planned, with all the generosity of her nature, which but yesterday would have leapt to feel certain galling chains removed, her thoughts wandered away to the police station, and to Cesare in the lock-up, with a board for his bed, and the smart of an unjust accusation goading him to yet more furious rebellion against his fate.

CHAPTER III

IF Wilbraham were certain of one thing, it was that Donna Teresa ought not to be encouraged to go to the police office. He already called himself an idiot for having let her do so, but as he had never been known seriously to take himself for an idiot, this was probably no more than a figure of speech. It meant, however, that he disapproved of her conduct, and especially of her sympathy for Cesare, for even the knowledge that the last accusation was untrue had not changed his opinion of the accused. Perhaps, if anything, the annoyance had accentuated it.

Yet, the next morning, when he ran

over what lay before him, he was not unwilling to admit that he should be early at Via Porta Pinciana, so as to make sure that Donna Teresa did not start on any fool's errand without him. And with disapproval so active, he might have been more gratified than he was to hear from Mrs. Brodrick that an absolutely disabling headache obliged the marchesa to leave everything in his hands.

'Please pay the fine, whatever it is, and see that he is released.'

'Better she should keep out of it,' said Wilbraham grimly.

'But she wants the man's address.'

'Don't let her have it,' he said unadvisedly, and then flushed, suddenly aware that he had spoken too warmly. 'The marchesa is young,' he said hurriedly, 'and there are bad parts in Rome, where she really ought not to go.'

'No doubt,' returned Mrs. Brodrick,

smiling. ‘But I never interfere with Teresa’s liberty, and she would like the address.’

‘Certainly,’ said Wilbraham, stiffening. He knew that he had gone farther than his acquaintance justified, and no one hated a false position more than he. Sylvia came into the room at this awkward moment, looking so pretty that her little froth of chatter seemed only part of the prettiness, particularly when she greeted him warmly.

‘Isn’t it tiresome for Teresa? But I told her I was sure you would manage everything perfectly. I don’t see that she need be so very unhappy, because if he was not a pickpocket he might have been one, of course; it was only a mistake, and you will set everything right, won’t you?’

‘I’ll do my best,’ he said gravely, but secretly pleased. Mrs. Brodrick turned away her eyes, and knitted impassively. She was conscious of wrong feelings

when her youngest grandchild chattered, and there were times when irritation got the upper hand, and she said something scathing, the only thing which Teresa ever resented. For Teresa upheld Sylvia through thick and thin, and would cheerfully efface herself for her sister.

Wilbraham walked towards the Trevi with his temper still ruffled, so that he scarcely glanced at the great fountain dashing its wealth of waters into the sea at its base. Passing it, he plunged into a network of narrow streets leading to the questura. He did not notice two or three men, who, standing at the door of the *Avanti* printing office, pointed him out to each other with scarcely perceptible gestures. Reaching his destination he found official feeling running high against Cesare, who, informed of the marchesa's gracious intention, had returned passionately that he would not accept it, he preferred prison. Until the marchesa's

expected arrival he had been remanded in confinement, and the officer was urgent that he might be left there.

'He is dangerous,' he repeated more than once.

Wilbraham was a prejudiced young man, but his English instincts for fair play rose up promptly.

'That won't do,' he said. 'You can't lay him by the heels unless he does something to deserve it.'

The official looked at this stubborn Englishman, and wondered whether he could influence him to leave well alone by suggesting a personal danger.

'He is not unlikely to stab—some one,' he remarked.

'Then some one must look out for himself,' said Wilbraham indifferently. He understood the hint, and it amused him. 'How much is the fine?' Reading continued unwillingness, he added—'A little more would be paid to ensure his being let out at once.'

He can't keep his lodgings here against your will, I imagine ?'

As it would have been a pity not to allow a mad foreigner the chance of getting rid of his money, the official named the sum with an added ten lire, and Wilbraham paid it with some contempt for its smallness. He was assured that Cesare would be immediately released ; and then conscientiously and unwillingly obtained his address. After lingering to gain a few statistics as to crime in Rome, he went on to a watch-maker's in the Piazza Venezia, and was returning when he met his man face to face. There was no mistaking the young passionate features or the burning eyes, and evidently Cesare recognised him as quickly. For an instant he paused, came on, held him with his gaze, and muttered 'Curse you !' as he passed. Wilbraham only smiled at what seemed to him a melodramatic incident, but it made him a little more

angry with Teresa for insisting upon following up so violent a character, certain to reject her good offices. He scribbled a few lines on a card, left it at the house in Porta Pinciana, and went away towards his hotel in the higher and newer part of Rome.

He was his own master, and often came to Italy, which pleased him, and where he felt himself free from certain annoyances which are apt to attach themselves to only sons, and are also occasionally imagined when they do not exist. Lady Wilbraham blamed herself now for having early uttered warnings which he had taken too dutifully to heart. He sniffed danger afar, and retired so effectually from matchmaking mothers, that it seemed likely he would never possess a mother-in-law at all. The instant it flashed upon him what might be at the root of any expressed feminine interest, no terrified mollusc could have snapped his shell more

effectually. In vain they wandered round, seeking for a glimpse, in vain dinners were got up, possible meetings sought for ; so resolved was he not to present the smallest loophole to the supposed attack, that he even fell into the unpardonable error of confusing his pursuers with those who had never flung a glance beyond friendliness in his direction, and of stoutly barricading himself against some who had not so much as dreamed of a siege. That is a crime which a woman never forgives. So that here, in this ultra-sensitive dread of giving himself away, lay a weakness, the more dangerous to his character because it was apt to deceive him into imagining it strength.

Lady Wilbraham was a keen-sighted woman, even where her affections were concerned, but this was not a matter in which she could offer advice, though she often bore the blame of his—what shall we call it ?—dislike of becoming

the prey of tongues ? coldness, pride ? fear of where he might unwittingly land himself ? Whatever it was, it was apt to hold him in bonds, and to alienate friends, for the nice women were those who were naturally the most indignant and who scourged him with their ridicule. Yet surely his object was exemplary, since above all things he desired to avoid raising false hopes. But he was also too much afraid of himself, too much afraid of becoming interested ; too much afraid of going a step beyond the point from which retreat was not only possible but natural ; too much afraid of, by some mischance, getting out of hand and allowing himself to be cajoled into a road where, he was certain, the demon of vain regret would instantly bestride his shoulders. So far his heart had invariably had pride for its master, and although there were those who prophesied rebellion, the reaction was not to be counted on, since

hearts may be starved into powerlessness, or paralysed by want of use.

Yet it was not marriage itself of which he disliked the idea. He was two-and-thirty, a barrister with sufficient practice, and the owner of a country seat where his mother had lived since his father's death. He intended in a year or two to give up law, live at the Court, and stand for Parliament. Marriage entered into all these contemplations. It was the woman, not the state which he dreaded, for that vague and shadowy She, however charming in dreams, became a terror, a warning beacon, whenever she touched reality or appeared in actual form. There was always a something to warn him off, a mother a little indiscreet, a bore of a brother, a girl who failed, by as little as you please, to reach his standard of perfection.

Of course the reason was not far to seek. He was critical, because never

having been in love, he was apt to doubt whether his heart could be stirred like the hearts of other people, and certainly it had never yet been strong enough to carry him where he did not wish to go. The question as to whether it ever would be strong enough remained unanswered. And the reason and the question left one certain thing to his credit, that unless he owned that inner force he would not have the courage to marry.

Donna Teresa passed before his mental vision more than once as he walked away from the Porta Pinciana, but he dismissed her image almost angrily. Sylvia, however, Sylvia? She was pretty, and somehow or other he felt grateful to Sylvia. If she were not very wise, it just crossed his mind that he had wisdom enough for two. His shadowy She had never been extraordinarily wise.

CHAPTER IV

THE misery, want, and degradation of Rome have this advantage over that of other cities, that they are lodged almost sumptuously in what should have been palaces. Those huge and hideous blocks of building which rear themselves in what are called the new quarters are no tumble-down age-stricken rabbit-warrens ; they have marble staircases, airy rooms, balconies, ornamental ironwork, lofty doorways. Built for riches, they have never represented anything beyond rags, dirt, loathsome crowding, and, for their owners, bankruptcy ; but they are better than dark cellars and fetid streets ; and air,

light, and sun, at least, visit their inhabitants. Moreover, blots as they are upon the old beauty of Rome, it is noticeable already from distant points, such as the front of Sant' Onofrio, or farther along the Janiculum drive, where form is scarcely to be distinguished, that in colour, at least, they begin to harmonise better with their surroundings, and that the sun, the great alchemist of the South, is turning raw whites and greys into tawny gold and amber, and that soft indescribable tone which is at once the joy and the despair of the painter.

Seen more closely, however, their aggressive ugliness is appalling, and Teresa, as she walked along certain streets which lay below the ascent to San Pietro in Montorio, glanced at the overgrown blocks with extreme distaste. She could see something of the emptiness and dirt of the houses, the strings of ragged clothes fluttering from balconies,

the evil-looking old hags stretching out skinny hands and muttering curses on her as she passed, the children with pinched and hungry faces, bare-footed, scantily clothed, with towzled hair and a smile which belongs to Italy, and Italy only. '*Un soldo, signorina, un soldo! Ho fame!*' Heaven help them; it was probably true; but Teresa, though she had soup tickets in her pocket, dared not give them yet, because she knew the word would pass from street to street, and that when she reappeared she would be surrounded, almost torn to pieces, by struggling claimants.

She found the number she was looking for, and picked her way up a broad staircase thick with accumulations of dirt. A ragged boy guided her to a door, at which she knocked. Another boy opened it, small, sickly, and lame. The two children stared at Donna Teresa, and she looked into the room

with interest. It was fairly clean, miserably bare, and empty as to the man she wanted. In answer to her question, the lame boy shook his head. Cesare was his brother, he was out, he did not know when he would return. Teresa was unconsciously annoyed by a whine in his voice of the same kind as that which she had just passed through. She sent away the first boy, who peeped and listened from round a corner, and asked questions, getting, oddly enough, exactly the answers she expected. Cesare was long absent. Angelino, his brother, was often hungry —oh, often, and his back hurt him, but, certainly, that often, too. With easiest flexibility of conscience he was prepared to admit all suggested evils and to invent any others which might affect this signora in a benevolent direction, so soon as he caught a hint of what would best serve his purpose. Teresa was shrewd enough at last to

find this out, and it changed her plan. Without giving a name she told the cripple that she would write to his brother, presented him with a lira for his own amusement, and fled. On her way home she reflected, with the result that in the evening a letter went to Cesare Bandinelli, enclosing five hundred lire and a few words : ‘ Will you remember that I owe you a reparation, and accept this for Angelo.—T. DI SANT’ E.’

She drew a sigh of relief when it was out of the house.

The next day was yet early when Nina, dumb but expressive, brought her a packet, which she recognised with a sinking heart. The money and her own letter were crammed into an envelope, as if thrust there by trembling and furious fingers. Not a word came with them, and Teresa’s face tingled as if she had been struck. After she had thought about it all day, she felt there

was nothing to do except to accept defeat and to tell Wilbraham, hating the telling as we hate to repeat an insult, but forcing herself, under the impression that the incident counted better for Cesare than for herself.

‘I ought not to have done it,’ she owned.

‘No, you ought not,’ assented Wilbraham coldly. ‘He’s an ungrateful hound.’

Teresa fired.

‘I can’t see where ingratitude comes in ! Do you expect him to be grateful for my mistake ?’

‘How was he the worse for it ?’

‘How ? Hasn’t he suffered ?’

‘Suffered ! A night in a police cell !’ said Wilbraham with a smile, which she thought insufferable. ‘My dear Donna Teresa, he has probably made acquaintance with such quarters before—or, at any rate, I will engage to find you fifty men who, for a

hundredth part of what you offer, would occupy them with all the goodwill in the world.'

It is the truth in our opponent's arguments which we find annoying. Teresa knew that Wilbraham spoke like a man of experience, and was angry. She flung up her head.

'You seem to forget that I said the money had been returned. Perhaps you will find fifty men to do that?'

'It would require sifting of my scoundrels,' laughed Wilbraham. 'I grant you that only the cleverest would remain.' He sat forward, and began to drive in his truths. 'Don't you see that the fellow is shrewd enough to read your thoughts and trade upon them?'

The air in the room had grown heated. Mrs. Brodrick's eyes rested anxiously for an instant upon the young marchesa's displeased face. Teresa did not speak. Wilbraham went on—

‘You may be sure he hopes to get more out of you than even your prodigal five hundred lire. He proposes to work upon your—what shall I call it?—sensitiveness.’

Teresa was sitting upright, and her eyes were very bright.

‘Is that the best you have yet found in human nature?’ she said quietly.

‘It is what I have most often found,’ returned Wilbraham with a little surprise.

She glanced at him so strangely that he felt an odd desire to excuse himself, almost a new sensation, but before he could speak, Sylvia broke in with the appealing timidity which he recognised as a pleasant contrast to her sister’s impetuosity.

‘I am sure you have done everything you could think of, Teresa, and so has Mr. Wilbraham. I daresay it will all come right by-and-by, when Cesare understands that it was only a mistake.

Everybody makes mistakes now and then, of course.'

It was these platitudes, announced as discoveries, which were apt to irritate Mrs. Brodrick. But she owned that occasionally they had their uses. Wilbraham now turned to Sylvia with an air of interest, while Teresa's face softened.

'Come,' she cried more gaily, 'let us talk of something else. Talk of tomorrow. Thank goodness, that must always be a new subject. What shall we do, good people? Shall we drive to Ostia?'

Sylvia opened her eyes. She was opening her mouth as well, when her grandmother spoke.

'If you do, I think I'll go with you.'

'That settles it,' said Teresa happily. She had recovered herself so completely that even Mrs. Brodrick wondered at the swift change, especially when she turned kindly to Wilbraham. 'You'll

come, too, won't you? I'll undertake to keep off dangerous subjects, and then I shan't be cross.'

'I'll come if I may.'

His tone was still a little stiff, and Teresa, glancing at him, saw that he was looking at Sylvia.

Except for the Tiber—and that can often be as grim as its history—the road to Ostia begins wearily. Farther on it grows rapidly in interest, till, when you reach Ostia itself, you think no more about beauty or interest, or your own passing sensations—it is too great. Sad, even in clearest sunshine, with rifled temples, ruined splendour, and the melancholy of its deserted gods, the sombre weight of centuries broods over it. The Tiber—no mere river here, but the symbol of a lost empire—swirls sullenly by, and as the sun sets and Vulcan's shrine crimsons in its glow, fever creeps shivering from misty pools and clutches its victims. Those who

go to Ostia should not linger too long.

But this day, on which Teresa brought her there, the sadness was but delicately suggestive and not oppressive. The air was warm, yet fresh and invigorating, and Teresa herself was in high spirits.

'Come,' she cried breathlessly, when she had climbed a steep bank, and stood looking out at the Tiber, now faintly yellow and grey, 'come, Sylvia, and let us be foolish by ourselves.'

'Foolish!' repeated Sylvia startled.

Mrs. Brodrick, had she been near enough, would have smiled, but Teresa nodded gaily.

'As foolish as we like. Mr. Wilbraham can look after granny and improve her, while we enjoy our ignorance. It's much better fun to imagine things than to know them. Let us run down there to begin with, and peep behind those columns. Who

knows what might not be hiding there !
Come, Sylvia !'

And she held out her hand.

But the girl looked round her doubtfully. She did not like foolishness when she heard of it, and her sister's imagination was apt to make her uncomfortable. Slow doubt crept into her voice.

'If you like—if you're sure it's safe.' She added more quickly, 'It's so very lonely there, isn't it ?'

Teresa instantly yielded.

'Let us sit where we are then. Nothing can be more charming,' she went on, dropping on the short turf and clasping her knees, while Sylvia took elaborate precautions against the damp she dreaded. 'Oh, Sylvia !' sighed Teresa, 'to think that I should really be sitting here and talking to you, after that life !'

'At Florence, do you mean ? I suppose the old marchesa was very

unkind, for you to have disliked it so much ?'

The other did not answer at once.

'Unkind ? Well, no, she did not mean to be unkind. Do you know, I believe you would have got on very well with her. I'm sometimes so dreadfully difficult ! But we won't talk about Florence. We are here, here, at Ostia, you, and granny, and I !'

'And Mr. Wilbraham,' put in Sylvia conscientiously.

'Yes, Mr. Wilbraham. You mustn't remind me of him when he is off our hands.' And Teresa shot a small grimace in his direction. 'Let us talk of something nice. What shall we do with all our money ? I shall get a dog. What will you have ?'

'Do you really mean I can choose something ?'

'Oh, silly ! Of course you may. What's the good of it otherwise ?'

'A new hat——'

‘Hat, frock, umbrella. Oh, you do want a new umbrella, Sylvia ! Yours is in holes. We’ll make a list. Have you got a watch ?’

‘No,’ said Sylvia, in amazement.

Her mouth remained open, while Teresa dragged out a card and jotted down thing after thing.

‘We must find out the best watchmaker,’ she said thoughtfully. ‘We must ask.’

‘Mr. Wilbraham,’ suggested Sylvia.

‘Mr. Wilbraham ! He doesn’t know everything.’

‘Oh, no, I didn’t mean that he did.’ Sylvia was often prosaically explanatory, desiring what thoughts she had to be distinctly outlined. ‘I meant that he was a man, and heard of things more than we could ; granny said so.’

‘Well, if it satisfies you, we’ll ask him. He will be so pleased !’

‘Why ?’

'Why?' The young marchesa laughed. 'He likes to stand on a pedestal, that's why, my child.' Seeing Sylvia's puzzled face she dropped the subject. 'Let us go on. The last thing was a watch. Now, what next? Ivory brushes?'

'Teresa! Don't get me anything more.'

'Then we'll take the other side of the paper for granny. I'm afraid she's going to be disappointing,' said Teresa gloomily. 'I intend to order a carriage by the month, of course, but when I ask her about other things she doesn't seem to care. She says habits are nicer than anything else when you're old. She likes to be frugal, because she's had to be all her life.'

'She loves books about Rome,' hazarded the younger girl.

'Oh, so she does! She shall have them, she shall have them all,' said the marchesa with a fine spread of

imagination. ‘How clever of you! Now the next thing is to find out about them.’

‘Mr. Wilbraham would know,’ said Sylvia, and Teresa, turning upon her with an impatient laugh, was struck suddenly dumb by catching a wistful glance flung towards the spot a little way off where Wilbraham stood patiently pointing out the intricacies of a ruined columned court. It seemed to her as if, in the shock of the surprise, her heart stopped beating. Most women have intuitions which are not unlike another sense, for they are as sure and as inexplicable; and hers swept the past days and took in the result in an instant. She had not thought of Sylvia marrying, because of that intangible want, of which she was conscious herself, while she resented the consciousness in Mrs. Brodrick. Yet, after all, what was it? Sylvia was not quite clever—might sometimes be thought a little tiresome.

A man might condone all that for a look in her face.

'Shall we go back to the others?' she said hesitatingly.

'Oh, yes!' cried the girl, springing up.

The marchesa, suddenly observant, began to think there was no doubt as to Sylvia's feelings. But what of his?

'I must find out,' she said to herself gravely.

Her grandmother greeted them with a smile.

'We were coming,' she said, 'but I have been reading my book, and you have skipped all the improving pages.'

'Do you mean Murray?' asked Sylvia innocently.

'Sylvia knows that my grandmother and her Murray are inseparable,' hastily interposed Teresa. She need not have minded. Wilbraham was looking at the girl with a pleased satisfaction. He thought that women were much alike,

except that some were prettier than others. Mrs. Brodrick laughed, and did not resent her granddaughter's explanation, but her eyes were grave and looked as if she, too, were observing. Teresa saw this, and saw that another had hit upon her discovery. She was very swift in carrying out her impulses, and she made up her mind that if Sylvia really liked this man her part must be to smooth matters for her happiness. The thought she flung at Wilbraham was tinged with a slight wonder, but his action was his own affair. She would do what seemed best for her sister.

'You are right, granny,' she said, 'we have wasted our time disgracefully. It was my fault. Sylvia wanted to come and be informed. So now !'

'Now we will have our food. All that I have heard has made me hungry.'

She spoke lightly, but her old eyes were still grave, and Teresa could see that what had come to them both was

troubling her grandmother. The consciousness of this roused a reckless spirit in herself. Wilbraham, who was not a keen-witted man where women were concerned, knew nothing more than that this luncheon of theirs, taken on a grassy hillock with the river close beneath the bank, and red ruins lying in sunlight, was pleasanter than anything he had experienced of late. He connected it with Sylvia, who sat beside him, and chirruped cheerful truisms. Mrs. Brodrick, who knew better, watched Teresa.

They strolled about afterwards, and went back through the ruins to fetch a young guide, who came out to them pale with ague. Teresa contrived that Wilbraham and Sylvia should be much together, but never alone. She fastened all her attention upon her sister, many times interposing with some guiding remark, only to slip again easily out of the conversation. They went into the

little temple of Mithras, which interested Wilbraham immensely.

'Sylvia never heard of Mithras,' reflected Teresa uneasily, and, while the younger girl opened an inquiring mouth, struck in with an intentionally ignorant question. Wilbraham answered, and Sylvia drank in his words without in the least understanding them. But Wilbraham was one of those men with whom attention is prized beyond intelligence, or perhaps supposed to represent the same quality.

Then they talked of the leading impression which touches us in such places as Ostia, where a far past reigns.

'Sylvia and I are vague,' said Teresa boldly.

'Isn't it a wonder that man should so quickly go, and his works so long outlive him?' asked Wilbraham.

'Isn't it a conviction that that is impossible?' put in Mrs. Brodrick.

'Perhaps,' said Wilbraham gravely,

and glancing at Sylvia. He was not a very religious man himself, but he would wish his wife to be religious. And then he hastily put aside the thought as ridiculous.

CHAPTER V

‘TERESA !’

‘Granny !’

The young marchesa, who was moving about the room, touching her flowers, and musing as to an improved angle for a tall bamboo which had arrived that morning to fill a lonely corner, turned with a shade of defiance in voice and manner.

‘Do you know what you are doing ?’

There was a momentary hesitation before the answer came.

‘Who does ?’

The defiance was already tinged with uneasiness, and facing the keen old eyes Teresa dropped her own.

‘Then I will tell you,’ said Mrs. Brodrick gravely. ‘You are playing a very dangerous game.’

‘Everything that is worth anything has its dangers,’ said Teresa, trying to speak lightly.

‘But we have no right to push other people into them.’

‘Push !’ Now the marchesa laughed outright. ‘Push ! Oh, be just. Do you pretend to say it would be possible to push Mr. Wilbraham into any position he hadn’t deliberately chosen ? You know better. He will walk round and round, and look at it closely from every side, and advance only when he is convinced it is eminently desirable and safe. He’s a hundred years old if he’s a day.’

‘That’s as you like. He is a good man.’

Teresa, imagining—perhaps with truth—that she detected a shade of regret in the tone, fired up promptly.

‘Not too good for my Sylvia.’

‘Not too good. But too clever, too exacting.’

‘You are never quite fair to Sylvia.’

‘Nor,’ said Mrs. Brodrick with a quick smile, ‘are you.’

Teresa moved uneasily.

‘She is very pretty.’

‘Very.’

‘And very good-tempered.’

‘Very.’

Then they paused.

‘Well, isn’t that enough for any man?’ Teresa asked, with a show of conviction.

‘It will not be enough for Mr. Wilbraham.’

‘That’s for him to judge. Why do you scold me? I’m doing nothing.’

‘I should have said you were spending your energies in making ways smooth and pleasant,’ her grandmother added after a momentary hesitation.

‘Well?’

‘Well, I have a theory that Love

cuts his own paths when he wants them.'

'Oh, granny,' protested Teresa, 'but you—you are so romantic! Things have changed.'

'No, no, they are eternally the same,' said Mrs. Brodrick, with a smile at her own failure.

After all, Teresa was not doing her justice, for her fears chiefly centred on Sylvia. Wilbraham, she agreed in her mind, could take care of himself, but if Sylvia suffered an acute sorrow, was her character strong enough to keep its equilibrium? She doubted. And she only faintly hoped that what she had said might influence Teresa, for, though it cost her something to offer advice she had very little belief in its being taken.

She began to wish they were out of Rome.

A month had passed since the day at Ostia; Wilbraham lingered, and had

even arrived at the point of acknowledging to himself that he was lingering, which is a long step for a cautious man. It was true that other friends of his and of Mrs. Brodrick's had arrived, and were in a hotel not far from the Porta Pinciana. Their advent seemed to fling him yet more comfortably with his first acquaintances, for a second man put him at his ease. Moreover, Colonel and Mrs. Maxwell wanted to see everything, since, although she had been born in Italy, he had never been in Rome. Teresa made herself his guide, and Sylvia fell naturally to Wilbraham. Teresa was still on the watch to cover blunders, but they had passed the stage in which she had been afraid to leave her alone with him. She even doubted whether he were alive to the difference in the conversation between Sylvia and Mrs. Maxwell, who could talk brilliantly. There she was mistaken. He saw, and, on the whole, thought he

preferred simplicity to brilliancy in a woman. He would have resented anything which made him ridiculous ; short of that, the girl he married would require few mental gifts.

There had been talk of the marchesa finding a larger apartment.

‘There is all this money to be spent,’ she said with a laugh, ‘and honestly I don’t quite know how.’

‘Do you want to go?’ asked her grandmother cheerfully.

‘Not I.’

‘Nina hopes, if you do,’ remarked Sylvia, looking up from knitting a sock, ‘that you will be very careful to take another crooked room ; it’s lucky, she says.’

‘I’ll have nothing more to do with Nina’s lucky theories,’ said Teresa. ‘Imagine, Mary,’ she went on to Mrs. Maxwell, who was lazily skimming an Italian newspaper, ‘on All Saints’ Day she brought us horrible biscuits made

like cross-bones, and expected us to eat them ! Biscuits of the dead, she called the dreadful things, and groaned all day over my want of devout feeling, when I couldn't look at them.'

'I wish you hadn't minded,' said Sylvia again, with some uneasiness.

Mrs. Brodrick fidgeted.

'And the other day, instead of our Italian paper, she brought word that the man had sold his out, but that he assured me it didn't matter, because there was nothing in it.'

'Your Nina sounds a hundred times more entertaining than my Peppina,' remarked Mrs. Maxwell. 'She knows nothing, and breaks everything. But then she is in love, and when she looks in my face with her beautiful eyes, and mentions that fact as a reason for all my misfortunes, what am I to do ?'

'Is her lover in Rome?' asked Mrs. Brodrick, rather from politeness than interest.

‘Yes. Every now and then he swoops down upon her, and she insists upon going out with him. I point out the inconvenience, and she cries, but goes. Then she comes back, and breaks more things. I wish he weren’t quite such a strong character.’

‘What is his occupation?’ said Teresa, amused.

‘So far as I can make out, it is pulling down the kingdom. This keeps him exceedingly busy. He has no money to speak of, and a lame little brother to support.’

‘Oh !’ cried the marchesa, suddenly intent.

‘What is that?’ inquired her grandmother, as keenly.

‘Why this stir?’ said Mrs. Maxwell, opening her blue eyes. ‘Are you two by any chance in the conspiracy?’

‘Does he live under S. Pietro in Montorio? Is he called Cesare Bandinelli? And has he a history?’ Teresa

questioned breathlessly. Then she jumped up and closed the window to shut out the noise of the electric tram and of the men who were crying ‘O-olive —go-o-omberi !’ with broad intonations. She came back exclaiming—

‘This is extraordinarily interesting. I know that Cesare, poor fellow !’

‘I don’t think you ought to call him poor fellow, Teresa,’ corrected Sylvia. ‘Mr. Wilbraham thinks him a very dangerous man.’

‘Oh, he’s dangerous, he’s dangerous, I daresay,’ agreed her sister, ‘but in our affair I was the sinner. Listen, Mary.’

And she told her story, ending oracularly, ‘So you see !’

Mrs. Maxwell was looking at her queerly.

‘Yes, I see,’ she said at last. I’m beginning to put things together. And,’ she went on, recovering herself with a laugh, ‘that always happens after I hear about Cesare.’

Teresa was too much interested and excited to notice anything unusual in Mary Maxwell's manner. Mrs. Brodrick, more experienced, watched her without asking questions.

'Perhaps we might manage to do something for the boy through Peppina?' Teresa suggested eagerly. 'I needn't show.'

'I think you had better leave it alone,' Mrs. Maxwell replied slowly. 'But I'll ask my husband,' she added, noticing the young marchesa's disappointment.

'Oh, he'll say the same. Men do. Please remember, Mary, that it would take a weight off my mind.'

'I'll remember. I'll do all I can.' Mrs. Maxwell promised so lavishly that Mrs. Brodrick was certain nothing was meant to come of it. And she was right, for nothing came of it, though Mrs. Maxwell kept her promise to remember.

'I don't like it,' she said to her

husband in the evening when they were alone, and he was admiring a cleverly blackened and altogether worthless picture, which he had picked up as a great bargain that day, at ten times its actual value.

'You know nothing about it,' he returned in an affronted tone. 'The light and shade——'

'Light and shade? Oh! I didn't mean the picture, I meant Cesare, Peppina's lover. Now do you understand? It must be our Mr. Wilbraham whom he is vowed vengeance against.'

Colonel Maxwell's ideas of Italian life were borrowed from the stage.

'Rum chaps. Always vowed vengeance, aren't they?' he said indifferently. 'I wouldn't bother about Wilbraham. He can take care of himself.'

'Well I don't like it,' repeated his wife.

'If the fellow's a brute, get rid of Peppina.'

‘That is absurd.’ Mrs. Maxwell was not accustomed to have her affairs interfered with so trenchantly, and she spoke with indignation. ‘That is so like a man. Peppina—when she isn’t breaking things—is the comfort of my life. The one comfort,’ she added emphatically.

‘All right.’ He stepped back to gaze rapturously at his picture. ‘Now I wonder who’s the best man here to trust with this sort of thing. I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if it turned out a Pinturicchio.’

Mrs. Maxwell, who knew much better, held revenge in her hand, and yet somehow could not use it. It would have been too downright, too brutal. She looked at him pityingly.

‘You had better not trust it to anybody,’ she said sweetly. ‘They might steal it. If I were you I should keep to soap and water. And,’ she added, quite inconsequently, as he thought, ‘Jim, you’re a dear old donkey!’

That ended it.

Mrs. Brodrick was restless ; Teresa, who could not, or would not, understand why, chose to insist that her grandmother wanted change of air, and suggested many manner of places, but places where they might all go together.

'It would be such a pity to break us up,' she said.

For a moment Mrs. Brodrick was silent.

'Where are we to go?' she asked a little wearily.

'Oh, darling,' cried Teresa, flying to kiss her, 'don't say it in such a tone. Don't be so tragically sorry ! Everything is arranging itself so prettily ! And I'll tell you where we'll go,' she hurried on, much as if she wished to block argument. 'Let us have a day or two at Perugia, so as to see Assisi.'

'All ?'

'How could we leave any one out ?'

asked Teresa reproachfully. ‘ You and Sylvia and I, of course.’

‘ Of course.’

‘ And the Maxwells, of course.’

‘ Of course.’

‘ And Mr. Wilbraham, of course.’

But Mrs. Brodrick was obstinately silent again.

The drag up to Assisi is long and dusty, yet with Assisi itself lying always splendidly as a goal in front, it is possible to forget both heat and dust. Olive groves straggle all about, chicory and blue thistles fringe the side of the road ; a personality which the world has not yet forgotten makes itself curiously felt when you come in sight of his fields, his mountains, his wide skies, and look back at the dome of St. Mary of the Angels bathed in soft mist. A Miss Sandiland, one of the many single women who go about the world alone, was of the party which was to spend a night at the Subisio. Hence they, at once, pursued

by clamorous beggars, climbed the stony streets to the broad arcaded spaces before the great church, Lombard and Gothic, with its square and round towers and vast magnificent porch. Then from the clear sunlight they turned into darkness —but what darkness ! Darkness out of which colours glow, colours laid on by Cimabue and Giotto, darkness shrouding in mystery those strange grave impassible faces looking down into a world which does not touch them. Teresa stood silent, squeezing her hands ; Sylvia asked many questions, and Wilbraham answered them ; a monk came forward and pointed out this, that, and the other ; another monk arranged hideous imitation flowers on the central altar. Presently Wilbraham came back to where Teresa stood.

‘The others are gone,’ he said.
‘Will you come?’

‘Gone, gone where ?’ she said, starting and looking round, ‘gone away ?’

‘No, no,’ he said indulgently, remembering that she was always scatter-brained, ‘oh no. But have you forgotten that there’s an upper church?’

‘Yes,’ returned Teresa briefly, ‘I had forgotten.’

‘May I show you the way?’

She followed silently up the stone staircase, and when they reached the top, he did not see that she again paused and left him to join the others.

After the gloom of the lower, the almost joyous gaiety of the upper church contrasts with it so amazingly that the effect must have been counted upon. Everything is in light delicate harmony. Slender columns of alternate pink and grey; bays roofed with ultramarine dividing others in which Cimabue’s frescoes gleam with strange greens and yellows; choir-stalls with shell-like canopies, lined with blue and gold, surmounting grave tarsia work of saints and angels. There is a small apse with

an arcaded gallery, the shafts of pink and grey, and at the back great angels stand on guard. An exquisite small stone pulpit is placed against the wall by the high altar, the column is cut away to give it room, and where it begins again is supported by a grasping hand. Under foot all is pink stone, and round the altar finest cosmatesque mosaic. The lower part of the wall is painted in soft reds and golds to represent looped hangings, and above this, on loveliest blue-green backgrounds, are the Giottos. Noble figures of Cimabue's look down from the roof; stately angels with red wings tipped with light visit Abraham: the saints' nimbus are worked out in raised plaster, the great Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, talk with monks in their cells; all is light, colour, glory; and the windows are large, with delicately stained glass, or, like that at the west, white.

Teresa came up to the others abruptly,

and only Mrs. Brodrick noticed that her eyes were wet.

‘It’s too much,’ she said with a quick motion of her hand. ‘What did they mean? Earth and heaven?—struggle and victory?—the church militant and triumphant?’

‘Don’t you like it, Teresa?’ asked Sylvia anxiously. ‘Mr. Wilbraham has been telling me so much about it. Did you know that Giotto was a shepherd boy——’

‘Was he?’ and Teresa, who knew all there is to know about Giotto, shot down from the heights to come to her sister’s help.

‘And Cimabue was his master,’ went on Sylvia, marshalling her little facts with pride.

‘It makes it much more interesting to know about them, doesn’t it?’ said the young marchesa, smiling at her, but glancing also at Wilbraham. She need not have feared. His eyes were on

Sylvia, he was seeing the young fair face, with its innocent expression, with lips just parted, and reading more than there was, and yet less. What did he care that she should not have Italian painters at her fingers' ends? He knew them himself, and the knowledge did not seem very valuable. Determination suddenly fired him, and Teresa seeing the look smiled again, this time triumphantly, and turned away.

When they came forth into the piazza, Colonel Maxwell's fever for 'picking up' things broke out.

'It's absurd to think one can't find something in a place like this,' he remarked argumentatively. 'I shall have a look at some of the side streets. I don't want to drag any of you, you know.'

'I must go with him,' sighed Mary Maxwell, gathering her dress round her with the air of a martyr, '—in self-defence. I don't know otherwise what

awful things he may bring to me to pack. Don't anybody else come.'

'I am coming. I like experiences,' said Miss Sandiland.

So these three went away, and the others set themselves to climb the steep broken streets towards the ruined Porta S. Giovanni.

'One is rather breathless, but after all it is not such a long step back to the Middle Ages as I thought,' said Mrs. Brodrick, as they passed between the rough grey stone houses, and turned to look at the sunset. There before them stretched the great plain, encompassed with hills of full blue-grey. A few small clouds, edged dazzlingly with gold, barred the sun, and hung over the mountains; above these a clear green Perugino sky melted overhead into the tenderest blue, and, lying across the seas of light, stretched clouds of most exquisite form and colour, their edges bright rosy red. Then they set

themselves again to climb steep streets, past broad, striding arches, low and dark, houses flinging out vast sheltering eaves, green doors, carnations hanging from windows, birdcages, squalor, vivid colour, women with their waterpots.

‘Where are the others?’ said Mrs. Brodrick suddenly, as they came out on the ruined gate.

‘Never mind, granny,’ answered Teresa, smiling softly, ‘I think they are doing very well.’

‘You are like other women,’ said her grandmother, shaking her head; ‘you will only see as much as you want to see.’

‘At any rate it’s too late now to see more.’

‘How do you know?’

‘I don’t know. I’m only convinced. Really and truly I’m delighted,’ she went on triumphantly, ‘and so you ought to be. What could you wish for better? We know all about Mr. Wil-

braham—except—no, I don't know his Christian name. Has he one ?'

Mrs. Brodrick refused to laugh. Teresa gazed at her with mock anxiety.

'Granny, I shall be really relieved when this affair is finished, I don't quite like you over it,' she sighed. 'Do you dream of anything dark in the background ? Or if I dislike it ever so much, do you suppose it could be stopped now ?'

'No,' admitted her grandmother. She added whimsically : 'But isn't that rather like starting a rock down hill, and asking whether you can be expected to stop it ?'

'Perhaps,' Teresa said. 'I don't think your simile pretty, all the same,' she went on. 'Nobody is going to be crushed ; and I believe you'll see that this being loved is just what Sylvia wanted to give her confidence. She'll develop.'

Mrs. Brodrick wanted to ask what

would develop, and didn't dare. She thought of Sylvia as a pretty face and a sweet nature masking an absolutely empty mind, and doubted. The young marchesa could not be always at hand to turn a stupid remark into something which did not seem so stupid after all, and she did not believe that Sylvia could stand on her own feet. She had done her best to stop what was happening and had failed. Age is tolerant, and there was nothing for it now save to accept failure.

'You and I,' said Teresa, with a caressing hand, 'will always live together.'

'Always,' said Mrs. Brodrick bravely, a smile covering the pain in her heart.

And she turned to go down.

When they reached the piazza the sky had changed. All the gold had gone. In its stead a long red line stretched across the mountainous horizon ; above it, light deepened into blue,

masses of clouds had suddenly trooped up from the south. Sylvia and Wilbraham came out quite unexpectedly from the shadow of the great church. Sylvia flew to her sister and caught her hand.

‘Teresa, Teresa !’ she cried under her breath.

CHAPTER VI

LATE into the night, facing the window, and the broad starlit sky stretching over the plain, Teresa sat with Sylvia's hands in hers, listening. She said little, she was trying to gather what were the girl's sensations—whether, as she unconsciously expected, things were awaking under this new touch. What perhaps surprised her most, though nothing would have induced her to own it, was Sylvia's own want of surprise. She, who was generally so timid, so scrupulous, seemed to take all as a matter of course. Teresa reflected that Wilbraham's wooing must have been amazingly effective, for Sylvia no longer

seemed to have a doubt about anything. She talked of 'we,' she alluded to plans with innocent egoism, she repeated some of the pretty things he had said. Once she jumped up and ran to the funny little looking-glass stuck against the wall, and came back smiling.

'He thinks my eyes charming,' she said frankly. 'You never said much about them?'

'One waits for lovers to do that,' laughed Teresa.

'I don't see why. Did the marchese admire yours?'

'How could he!' Teresa spoke with sharp pain, the pain of remembrance. 'I was never pretty, like you, child.'

'No,' said Sylvia, looking at her with her head on one side, 'I suppose not. Walter said you were not.'

'Oh, Walter. That's his name, is it?'

Teresa hated herself for speaking with a certain asperity. It is so much

easier to disparage one's self than to bear with others doing it. But Sylvia was at last genuinely amazed.

'Do you mean that all this time you never knew *that*? Why, I have always known it. Teresa, how very funny! You have never thought about him as Mr. Walter Wilbraham? It is such a beautiful name! But that you should not—Teresa, you *are* funny!'

'I shall know now.'

'Of course you will.' The girl gazed at her almost with compassion, as at one whom Wilbraham had called absent-minded. 'It will be my name, you know. At least, I think so, as there is his mother. Perhaps,' she added pityingly, 'perhaps you have forgotten that there is a mother?'

Teresa turned and kissed her impulsively.

'A mother—yes, what does it matter, what does anything matter? Only be happy, be happy, dear!'

‘I am very happy,’ said Sylvia simply. ‘And I like so much talking to you about it.’

‘Always talk to me—not to any one else.’

‘Not to granny?’

‘No, not to granny—not even to granny. I’m your sister, I can understand,’ cried Teresa, with a protective yearning in her heart, a defiant uprising against Mrs. Brodrick’s prognostications.

‘But I shall talk to Walter first,’ said Sylvia; ‘of course, I shall tell him everything.’

‘Of course,’ returned her sister. Yet her heart sank, and long after Sylvia was sleeping peacefully in her little bed, Teresa sat at the window, her hands clasping one knee, while she looked out at the wonderful night, and wondered how soon Wilbraham, who was not a fool, would find out that he had indeed reached the bottom of everything.

But by the morning her fears had

left her. By the morning she was her energetic, suggestive self, with an added touch of cordiality in her manner towards Wilbraham. She owned, as they sat at breakfast in the uninviting feeding-room of the Subisio, that he was a striking-looking man, taller than most, and broadly made. There was a greater suggestion of strength about him than she had yet realised, and, like other women, Teresa liked strength. Generally she felt an inclination to contradict him, but this morning she adopted all his suggestions readily—so readily, that once Mrs. Maxwell, who had not yet been enlightened, and was unused to seeing Teresa so meek, put down her cup and stared at her. Teresa laughed a little, and went on being pleasant.

‘You’ll see how good I am going to be,’ she said triumphantly to Mary Maxwell, when she had told her.

‘Well, don’t turn the man’s head,’ replied her friend.

‘My dear, the only thing that can turn a man’s head is a pretty face.’

‘I’m not so sure.’

‘That’s because you’ve one of your own.’

‘Oh !’ cried Mrs. Maxwell delightedly, ‘you’re charming ! I had almost forgotten what a compliment was like. If Jim had the sense to throw me a few, I should be ready to swear all his discoveries were genuine. Why, why are husbands so foolish ?’

Later, when they were clambering again up the stony streets, she caught Mrs. Brodrick alone.

‘Let us forget all about St. Francis for a few minutes and talk about St. Sylvia,’ she said ; ‘she is our heroine to-day, and the best of creatures, isn’t she ?’

‘As good as gold,’ assented Mrs. Brodrick hastily.

‘But the best of creatures may be the least little bit in the world—tiresome ?

Oh, don't let us be quite good ourselves, let us say what is on the tip of our tongues. How can any one look at Sylvia when Teresa is by ?'

'When you're my age,' said the older woman, 'you will have given up asking questions.'

'When I'm your age I shall try to answer other people's,' said Mary, with a laugh. 'Do you believe for a moment that it can go on?—particularly when Teresa withdraws, as she must, into the background, and leaves Sylvia to stand alone?'

Our own thoughts are apt to look the uglier, held up by another person, and Mrs. Brodrick would have chosen silence. As it was she said quietly :

'Mr. Wilbraham is not the man to make mistakes.'

Mary Maxwell laughed shrewdly.

'You mean he's not the man to acknowledge them. There you're right. I daresay he will stick to Sylvia rather

than own himself in the wrong. Well, perhaps obstinacy has its uses. I wonder what they are talking about now ? ' she added, wickedly.

At the moment when she asked the question, the two concerned were also climbing steep streets—since at Assisi you must go up or down—stopping every now and then to look through narrow vistas of grey stone houses, towards the fair blue distances which lay beyond. Wilbraham was not so much in love that he had not some uncertainty as to how much he ought to say about it ; sometimes, indeed, he felt that he had said but little. Sylvia, however, was quite satisfied. She was not exacting, and she had been brought up in an atmosphere which had given her trustfulness. When Wilbraham had once said he loved her, it would not have occurred to her to doubt the fact.

So, as they went, she babbled cheerfully and disconnectedly, turning to him

from time to time the face which invariably gave him a renewed feeling of satisfaction. Had he pulled his own feelings to pieces, he would have realised that his love was not a sweeping force, but, rather, intermittent, moving in jerks, or brightening up now and then like a flame stirred by a sudden current. As it was, he felt quite sufficiently sure of himself to be content.

‘What charming children !’ cried Sylvia, stopping to smile at a group. ‘Aren’t they sweet ? I always think the Italian children have such beautiful eyes. Have you ever noticed it ?’

He assured her that he had.

‘I like them so much when they don’t come *quite* close, because, do you know, they are not very clean. Poor little souls, I daresay they can’t help it, though. Oh, please, please send them away !’

‘Be off !’ cried Wilbraham, coming to the rescue.

Sylvia hurried on till she was breathless.

'I can't think why they beg so!' she said piteously. 'They really frighten one!'

The sweet helpless eyes turned towards him stirred the flame again. He took her hand in his.

'My darling,' he said tenderly, 'you mustn't be frightened when I am by, and they were very little children.'

'They were dreadfully dirty — all rags,' she said.

'When we're married, Sylvia——'

'Yes?'

She lifted her face, and he kissed it, forgetting what he was going to say.

'I suppose there are plenty of schools and things at Blackmere?' she asked reflectively.

'Oh, I suppose so.'

'I hope I shan't have to teach the multiplication tables?'

‘Why should you?’ he said briefly.
The flame had again died down.

‘I fancied people did. Do you know,
I was thinking about it in the night.’

‘The multiplication table?’

‘I never could learn beyond six
times. Until one came to ten, of
course,’ she added triumphantly. ‘And
granny says Teresa could say it back-
wards—when she liked.’

‘I wouldn’t trouble my head about it.’

‘No, I won’t,’ said the girl obedi-
ently.

Wandering about a tangle of narrow
streets, rugged, uneven, unchanged to
all appearance from those Middle Ages
when men’s lives and men’s thoughts
were both simpler and more frankly
expressed than in our subtler days, they
found themselves in the central piazza,
where Minerva’s columns have faced
the sun of centuries. Wilbraham had
made his way there the evening before,
and had been so much impressed by

their grandeur that he had looked forward to bringing Sylvia. This morning he said to himself that they were not what he had imagined them, and Sylvia hardly glanced in their direction, until he pointed them out.

'I see. They are very pretty,' she commented. 'What did you call them?'

'They belonged to a temple of Minerva.'

Sylvia reflected.

'Then—' she hesitated—'they must be old, I suppose?'

'Very,' he said, smiling.

'Ah, I thought so. I know one used to learn something about Minerva in one's lesson books.'

Wilbraham almost started. He had accepted the fact that Sylvia was rather unusually ignorant, but somehow or other until now Teresa had been there, to toss aside any wonder with a jest. It had never come before him in so

staringly obtrusive a light. And Sylvia, anxious to prove her interest, went on gravely—

‘Hadn’t she something to do with an owl?’

But, as she said it, kind fate made her turn her face again up towards his. He looked, and laughed.

‘You’ve remembered one thing, haven’t you, darling? We’ll read up about Minerva some day. People do forget their classics.’

‘I know those gods and goddesses always seemed very silly,’ she returned, encouraged. ‘They never lived, and the things couldn’t have happened, so why should we think about them?’

Why indeed? And, with the thought, visions of beautiful myths floated up before his eyes, and he wondered whether the time would come when he could as easily dismiss them. He did not as yet understand that they had never yet touched her

at all, so that it was no question of dismissal. And she had her eyes still turned to his.

‘You like real history better? Well, let’s go back to St. Francis; he’s real enough. Or—’ and his voice changed, for love, even a little love, will show people truths, if only they will let it; and for the first, the very first time in his life, Wilbraham wondered whether he were indeed a prig—‘or never mind any of them, dear, we’ll only think about to-day.’

‘Yes,’ she said happily, drawing a little closer to him as his hand sought hers, ‘yes, that is nicer.’

And as they strolled round the piazza, and looked—with his eyes—at the pictures which lived all round them, at shadowy eaves, flowers in dark windows, bits of carving, children in bright rags, women carrying pitchers; mules, vegetables, big umbrellas, gourds, maize, tomatoes, shade, sun, he said

again and again to himself, how sweet she was, and how content a man should be with such a wife.

They were standing at last by an open washing place at the side of the street, where a group of women thumped and wrung, much to Sylvia's distress—for it seemed to her a destructive way of washing clothes—when Teresa and Miss Sandiland came round a corner.

‘Oh !’ murmured Miss Sandiland, catching sight of them, and slackening her steps significantly.

But the young marchesa marched on. When she had not Sylvia before her, unacknowledged uneasiness fretted her ; she was sure that by a look she could judge how the two were getting on, and whether Sylvia had, as Mrs. Maxwell would have said, yet put her foot in it.

‘Well,’ she called out, ‘you two got the start of us. I expect you have seen everything.’

‘Yes, everything,’ said the girl confidently. ‘There isn’t much, is there? It’s not like Rome, of course.’

‘And you’ve a kinder taskmaster. Poor Sylvia,’ she went on to Wilbraham; ‘you know the sort of muddle one gets into with too much sightseeing? That’s where I’ve landed her. I worked her too hard, and I’m not up in things myself, and—I think she’s a good deal mixed by this time,’ she ended with a laugh.

‘Oh, I don’t think I am,’ remonstrated Sylvia, nodding her head; ‘you know I can find my way about Rome as well as you.’

‘So that you won’t be like the lady who asked her husband if she’d seen the Coliseum,’ put in Wilbraham, smiling at her.

‘No-o-o,’ she said, more doubtfully. ‘Did she really? I wonder she didn’t remember that, because it’s so big.’

‘We’re going on to the piazza,’ said

Teresa hastily. ‘Please put us in the way. Oh, look !’

For across the street beyond them swept, with long strides, the figure of Colonel Maxwell. Something—they could not see what—he was clasping in his arms; and at his heels—laden, one with a piece of stone, another with a panel of carving; some (and these were naturally the most clamorous) with only disappointed hopes—ran half-a-dozen or more children. Behind the last, at breathless distance, followed his wife. She waved a despairing greeting to the group, and vanished.

‘Actæon and Diana,’ said Miss Sandiland, as soon as she could speak.

‘Or,’ suggested Wilbraham, ‘the Pied Piper.’

‘Who was he?’ Sylvia asked.

‘Oh, he’s Browning,’ Teresa answered promptly, ‘and Browning’s beyond me.’ She observed, with added uneasiness, that Sylvia’s changed circumstances

encouraged her to talk and ask more questions than usual.

Curiosity and laughter made them hasten up the hill, and turn into the street which had engulfed their friends. Nothing could be seen of the Maxwells, but two or three of the less lucky of the children were coming back slowly. Strangely for Assisi, where the past reigns, and its stones have set themselves down greyly and determinedly as the earth itself, a piece of wall had yielded so far to time that it was evidently held dangerous, and had been propped by one or two not very strong supports. The English people passed by it, Wilbraham last. He glanced up, and saw a quiver, an ominous bulge. The wall was falling, and underneath was a little creature of four or five years old, staring at him with large unheeding eyes ! There was no time to snatch her away. Wilbraham was a very strong man, and he shouted, flung his

weight against the falling stones, and for a moment held them back. Teresa turned, saw, rushed, caught at the child, dashed her into safety, would have run back once more, but it was too late ; the whole mass was sliding and crumbling into a heap in the road, and Wilbraham, borne down with it, lay motionless.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER the first shock of horror came relief, for Wilbraham was only momentarily stunned, got up, shook himself, and laughed at their anxious faces. Sylvia flew to his side, and was brushing the dust and rubble from his coat before her face had recovered its colour, or a question had been asked. At another time the others would have smiled at the helpless and incongruous action, but their smiles had been frightened out of them for a while, and Miss Sandiland was the first to find a voice.

‘ You must be hurt—somewhere ! ’ she exclaimed.

Wilbraham laughed ruefully.

'I don't deny it,' he said, beginning to feel himself over, and wincing. 'But nothing serious, nothing broken —only bruises. Let's get out of it. Where's the child? All right?'

A crowd had quickly collected. There were exclamations, gestures, and presently a very Babel of grateful cries, which, to Wilbraham's disgust, pursued them as he limped stiffly away.

'One child more or less,' he said grimly. 'Can it matter?'

After they had gone a few steps he remarked: 'I didn't do much good. Who pulled it out?'

Miss Sandiland had a high bird-like voice. She broke into admiration of Teresa's courage; Sylvia, recovering her speech, admired them both; Teresa, who had not yet spoken, began to share Wilbraham's uneasy shyness, and to hurry on; Miss Sandiland, with a proper sense of leaving the lovers to-

gether, following her closely. They did not, either of them, know where they were going, but they found themselves in the piazza of the great church, and Mrs. Brodrick came to meet them from its porch.

'What is the matter?' she asked, for Teresa's face was still white.

'Nothing,' said the girl briefly. 'But there might have been something.'

Miss Sandiland began the story, and Teresa slipped away into the darkness of the lower church. She went straight into its deepest gloom, and knelt, as the peasants kneel, on the stones, worn by the weight of countless sorrows. She had been very near death, and she knew it, but Sylvia had been nearer to what might have crushed the joy out of her life, and though she thought of the one, she thought a great deal more of the other deliverance.

Mrs. Brodrick was quietly waiting

for her when she came into the sunlight again, and put out her hand.

‘My dear !’ was all she said.

‘Don’t pity me,’ said Teresa, smiling, ‘I had no time to be frightened. It was a brave thing for him to do, and I don’t know how he got out of it. Have you seen him ?’

‘Yes. He has hurt his leg, and bruised himself ; nothing worse, I hope. We shall get back to Rome this evening.’

‘And Sylvia ?’

‘Sylvia was in a flutter, and I gave her sal volatile.’

‘Of course ; it was worst of all for her,’ said Teresa, instantly on the defensive.

‘It must have been,’ agreed her grandmother gravely. She was glad that Teresa had not seen Sylvia’s queer little ways of showing her agitation, which she fancied Wilbraham found irritating, although she told herself

constantly that grandmothers were, perhaps, the most ineffective of people to judge the sensations of a man in love. But Sylvia had talked too much, of that she was convinced. And it was already no longer like old days, when the girl was hesitating and uncertain of herself. Now it would have been difficult to stop her.

Teresa owned this—she owned things occasionally to herself, though she fought valiantly with others—when she had wearily climbed the stairs to their room, and found her sister stretched on her bed. For Sylvia started up on her elbow, and poured forth a flood of small exclamations, small lamentations, small congratulations, small wonderings. What had been stirred in her? How deep were the springs? or were there really no springs, only a little sheet of thin water, giving back the blue of heaven, it is true, but soon plumbed, and altogether unsatisfying for a thirsty

soul? Donna Teresa found herself putting this question, and then ready to beat herself for putting it. For was Sylvia to-day really different from yesterday, when she had so longed for the thing which had come to pass? Was Wilbraham different that he should have awakened a sudden sympathy? And there she paused, for her nature was frankly honest, and she had to own that his personality had, at least, come home to her in a different light. He had done a very brave thing, and he had done it simply. Those few moments in which, by sheer force, he had held back the falling wall, had saved the child's life, and she liked even the physical strength which he had shown, as a strong woman is pretty sure to like strength in a man. It becomes a type to her, and she almost always idealises it.

So as Sylvia talked, Teresa grew more silent.

Wilbraham treated his hurts too lightly, and had two or three weeks of lameness after they reached Rome. Naturally he spent most of his time in the Porta Pinciana—that beautiful, soft, fresh, early winter-time of Rome, when day after day the sun shines gaily out, when the sky is of an ineffable colour, when beyond the broad stretch of the campagna the bordering mountains take wonderful tints of clear yet veiled blue ; and across the campagna itself flocks of sheep and lambs, guarded by shepherds in goatskin leggings, wander knee-deep in aromatic pastures, pale grey thistles, fennel withered into tall and slender stalks of yellow, and, underneath, a growth of grass and red-brown herbage. Then, as the sun goes down in a daffodil sky, wherever you may be you find some new expression of loveliness : churches and towers stand out against it ; the great dome of St. Peter's draws all eyes to its splendid curve ; the Palatine ruins stand

solemn and deserted ; and the brick tower of St. Andrea, where by day the pigeons crowd, holds up its flower cap of a belfry softly dark against rosy bars of cloud.

Mary Maxwell and Teresa were much taken up with their drawing in those days. A vague uneasiness which possessed Teresa could best be laid to rest by the absorption of a sketch. She no longer watched Sylvia, having hastily determined that it was an idiotic idea to suppose that her help was necessary. Of course Wilbraham was in love, and, being in love, he would not be annoyed by trifling mistakes. At any rate—but this she said quite to herself—he must get used to them. Sylvia was happy, that was the great, the real thing, and in spite of such philosophy she was anxious. In an indifferent and casual manner she tried to extract a little information from her grandmother as to what was talked about, but Mrs. Brodrick answered briefly.

'Oh, well,' Teresa went on, 'everybody says the same thing in the same circumstances.'

'Everybody says the same thing, only some people say it differently.'

'Some people are not half so pretty!' cried Teresa triumphantly and illogically.

She went away into her own room at once lest she should weaken Sylvia's cause by remaining, and the next moment Sylvia herself appeared. Her sister glanced quickly at her. Were disquieting confidences at hand? But no; the charming eyes were quite untroubled.

'I heard you come in,' she said.

'Yes,' said Teresa, sticking up a half-finished sketch for contemplation. 'All the lights changed, so we had to stop. What have you been doing? Has Mr. Wilbraham been here?'

'No. We are to drive by-and-by, but he had letters to write this morning

—he often has,’ said Sylvia simply. ‘*I* think it a good thing that a man should have plenty to do,’ she added, with the touch of decision which was now accentuating her truisms.

‘There’s a discovery !’ Teresa cried gaily, and then was smitten with compunction. She need not have minded.

‘You don’t agree with me,’ said Sylvia in the same tone, ‘because you don’t appreciate Walter. Of course, I understand him better ; I understand him very well indeed. And I wish you wouldn’t call him Mr. Wilbraham, Teresa. It sounds so funny with your own brother-in-law.’

‘My dear ! He isn’t my brother-in-law yet.’

‘It’s just as if he were,’ announced the girl calmly.

‘Oh,’ cried Teresa rashly, ‘but it isn’t ! You know people who are engaged don’t always marry. They find out that they have different tastes, or

that they don't care enough, or——' She stopped suddenly, wondering what force had laid bare her own fears.

Sylvia smiled pityingly.

'People are silly,' she said.

'And,' said the marchesa, almost breathlessly—'and you are never afraid ?'

'Of course not. Why should I be ?'

'Why should you be,' repeated Teresa, kissing her after a momentary pause, 'when he loves you ?'

'Of course he loves me. He told me so,' said Sylvia conclusively.

'What has come to me that I shouldn't be content to let well alone ?' her sister asked herself. 'It would be another matter if I had seen anything to make me uneasy. But I haven't. No, I haven't,' she repeated determinedly. Then her eager face brightened again. 'Sylvia,' she said, 'I'll try to call him Walter. If I choke, you won't mind ?'

‘Why should you choke?’ said Sylvia, opening her eyes in surprise.

When she and Wilbraham were driving along the Via Appia that afternoon, for Wilbraham as yet could not walk without difficulty, she told him, with satisfaction and a good deal of emphasis, of Teresa’s promise.

‘Yes,’ he returned indifferently. But he began to fidget. He often fidgeted over Sylvia’s careful explanations.

‘Because, you see, it really seemed so strange that you two should not call each other by your christian names! If you’re not related, you’re going to be related, quite nearly related, and then I don’t see how you could help it. Do you?’

‘No.’

‘No. Exactly. That’s what I said to Teresa’—Sylvia’s voice was very low and confidential—‘I said I thought it sounded so funny for her to call her brother-in-law Mr. Wilbraham, and she

said you weren't her brother-in-law yet.'

'And what,' he asked, forcing himself into interest, 'did you answer to that obvious fact?'

'Of course I said it was all the same, and she said that sometimes people who were engaged did not marry, and I said that people were very silly. So they are, aren't they?'

There was a twist, a muttered exclamation by her side, and Sylvia turned anxiously.

'Does your leg hurt you so much to-day?'

'Yes—no!' The words sounded like a groan, but Wilbraham recovered himself at once. 'You're too good to me, Sylvia, and I'm—a brute.'

She laughed happily.

'I wonder why you all like to call yourselves names? You and granny and Teresa so often do it, and I never do. But I'm so glad you're not worse. I

don't think you could hide it away from me if you were. Well, and don't you want to hear a little more what Teresa said ?'

'I don't think I do just now,' he said desperately. 'I want you to look at the mountains. Stand up, and you'll see them better.'

She always did what he suggested.

'How pretty !' she commented.

'And the tombs,' he hurried on. 'I expect you can see a good many behind you.'

'It was so funny of them to like to have their tombs out here, and spread all about. People are generally buried together, as they should be,' said Sylvia disapprovingly, as she dropped again by Wilbraham's side. 'Don't let us talk about the tombs, dear. We were having such a comfortable chat, and I do so like it ! Now, are you sure your leg is quite comfortable ?'

'Quite,' he returned, trying hard

to keep impatience out of his voice.
‘Quite.’

‘That’s right.’ She nestled closer to him, and he hated himself for the small irritation with which he always received her intonation of the two words, the first pitched on a higher key than the second. ‘I like coming out here, where no one can interrupt us.’

‘It’s a wonderful place.’

‘Because we’re here together, isn’t it?’

‘Dear, you mustn’t expect me to say too many pretty things.’

‘Of course not,’ said the girl simply. ‘You’ve said so many, and of course I remember them all. I’m not so silly as to expect you to go on. Whatever you say and do I like.’

‘Don’t,’ he said with unusual vehemence, ‘don’t set me up on a pedestal, whatever you do! I’m clay. Poor clay, too.’

‘Clay?’ She looked bewildered.

A rush of irritable shame was upon

him, a nightmare weight as if all that he did at this time was false. It had touched him before, but he had succeeded in arguing with it, for to a man of his self-contained character it was easy to argue that, after so many precautions and limitations, it was impossible he should have given himself away. It was easy to argue, and he was able to bring incontrovertible reasons to support his case. The reasons had not changed. Sylvia was the same: as sweet-tempered, as amenable, as pretty as ever. The same, the same, the same—why, there lay the sting! If in three or four weeks this sameness, this insipidity, was making him sick to death, why, what—oh, God, what would a whole married lifetime do? She had not a thought which branched in a wrong direction, but he said to himself bitterly that he did not believe she owned anything which could be dignified with the name of thought; she only made scrappy little applications

of other people's ideas when they reached her in their simplest forms. His intellect was judging, despising her, scourging him with the belief that he had chosen a fool for his wife, mocking his vanity, his hopes, dropping him into depths of despair. Time, which brings healings for most sorrows, looked his worst enemy. Time—Eternity—and Sylvia !

CHAPTER VIII

TERESA's fortune made less difference in her life than she had expected. It gave her pleasure to be able to do more than plan for others, but she was uncertain whether her fresh powers added to their happiness. There was Sylvia ; Sylvia was provided for otherwise, and Wilbraham's worst enemy would not have accused him of sordid motives. Perhaps he was not uninfluenced by social advantages. Perhaps it had been more easy for him to fall—coolly and decorously to fall—in love with a girl who was dressed with care, and no longer tramped along wet pavements, than with one obliged to study petty

and occasionally disfiguring economies. But there was another side to this 'perhaps,' a side which Donna Teresa was trying not to see, and, at times, successfully succeeded in suppressing. Had he ever been really in love?

But she was sure he never could be what she called really in love.

Next to Sylvia came her grandmother. Her grandmother was old. Age wants to have the rugged bits of life's road made smooth for steps no longer buoyant and unfaltering. Teresa thought of a hundred ways for doing this, yet, after all, they came to very little. For as Mrs. Brodrick had foreseen from the first, we can't wrench off the habits of a lifetime without hurt.

'My dear,' she said with a laugh at herself, 'I've always burnt one candle instead of two. When you light three my room looks a great deal nicer, but I'm uneasy. I blow one out as soon as ever I get the chance.'

'I shall put in electric light,' Teresa declared. 'You are a wicked woman.'

'I'm a frugal one if you please, and it's disturbing at my time of life to find one's virtues turned into vices. I can't afford it. I haven't time to get a new set.'

Under the jest there lay earnest, as Teresa's quick sympathy instantly discovered.

'Granny,' she said wistfully, perching herself on the arm of her grandmother's chair, 'is there really nothing I can do? You're sure it isn't a horrid mean little feeling of pride?'

'I am sure of nothing,' said Mrs. Brodrick, smiling, 'except that I am lazy.'

Baffled in this direction, Teresa's mind rushed off to farther points,—doubling, trebling her subscriptions, and searching for objects which were not long in presenting themselves, all with outstretched hands. Her money

flew, yet left her unsatisfied. At every turn problems met her, and when she pushed them impatiently on one side, they still clamoured in her ears. She wanted to know more of the real question of the people, and could not reach it. She talked to Nina.

‘Eh-h-h-h-h ! Misery enough, eccellenza !’

‘That I know. But why ?’

‘Why ? Who knows ?’ Nina spreads her hands. ‘There is no work, or if there is work there is no money to buy it with. But whether there is no work or no bread, there is always the tax, tax, tax.’

‘Is it that the country is so poor ?’

‘There are many who grow rich on its poverty, eccellenza,’ Nina replied significantly.

‘What do the people think would make things better ?’

‘Eh-h-h-h ! Who knows ? There is wild talk.’

Teresa was frowning.

'Heaven knows if I were one of them I should talk wildly myself!'

She spoke to Wilbraham, and he answered her gravely and at some length, for in a theoretical fashion the subject interested him.

'What can you do when there is a mass of bribery on the upper level, and an undisciplined people below? Unhappily the nation is a prey to the miserable system of bargaining, or, as it would be called, of *combinazione*. Everything, from the prayers of the Church downwards, is to be had for a consideration, and without it too often Justice halts, and Religion makes no sign. Read their own pictures of their own deputies. Until you cure that sore, it seems to me that help is useless.'

'Then you think that bribery and not taxation is the cause of their misery?'

'No doubt the nation is over-taxed,

and in consequence its energies are largely spent upon efforts to evade taxation. In this, as may be conceived, the rich are much more successful than the poor, who have fewer means of escape, and are forced from wretchedness to wretchedness, and to yet lower depths again. The richer man lays out something judiciously, and his rating sinks accordingly. The poor man hasn't got the money to lay out, and he is crushed.'

'Ah, poor souls!' Teresa cried impulsively.

'But,' asked her grandmother, 'why don't they use their vote to get reform?'

'I can't conceive,' said Wilbraham. 'In spite of never-ceasing murmurs against the government of the day, they refuse to recognise that to a large extent they hold the remedy in their own hands. An incredible proportion don't go to the polls at all, and it is not only the large numbers who obey the Vatican instructions to abstain, but hundreds

stay away, I can only suppose, from indifference or hopelessness. Sometimes it seems that they are like children, who can't look beyond the hour. They have a proverb, "An egg to-day is better than a hen to-morrow." Contrast this with our "bird in the hand," which sounds like it and yet has a very different meaning.'

'And still they have such fine qualities!' said Mrs. Brodrick.

'Gratitude, for one,' added Teresa.
'It is a joy to help them.'

'And that leads to pauperising,' Wilbraham insisted. 'Even the best of you do a lot of harm. There's that young priest out in the San Lorenzo quarter. His work in one sense is magnificent. I admire his self-devotion tremendously, but I also think he has got hold of the wrong end of the stick, and is regenerating a few at the cost of encouraging a seething hot-bed of beggars.'

‘It’s easy to criticise,’ Teresa said.

‘That I own. As easy as to see other people’s faults. We’ve plenty of our own ; only at this moment we were discussing why Italy is not prosperous in spite of an excellent king and queen.’

‘And your cure would be to let them starve !’ cried Teresa unjustly. ‘Do you ever think of the women and children ?’

‘Yes ; I think of them a good deal,’ he returned, looking quietly at her.

‘Yet can suggest nothing ?’

‘Except as a spectator. Is that of any practical use ?’

She turned impatiently away, but the next moment was back and holding out her hand.

‘I’m afraid I was very rude,’ she said, her grey eyes looking frankly into his. ‘I’m all in a puzzle myself, and expect other people to pull me out of it

—in the way *I* think best, of course,' she added with a laugh.

As his hand closed round hers, Wilbraham was conscious of a strange unsteadiness in his grasp. He turned pale, hardly knowing what to answer.

'I should like to—to help you,' was what he lamely said.

'Who can?' said Teresa, shaking her head. It's my snare that I will never believe things mayn't be altered —improved—or that I shouldn't have a finger in the mending. Sylvia will tell you that, and here she comes to stop us from quarrelling any further.

'Quarrelling?' cried Sylvia anxiously.

'Well,' returned her sister, 'at any rate, you arrived in the middle of an apology, and it was mine.'

'Never mind, then,' said the girl, nodding her head. 'I know Walter won't be angry. Not really angry, you know.'

'Don't be too sure,' mocked Teresa,

going away. At the door she flung a shaft at Wilbraham. ‘Don’t you think before worse comes to worse we might apply to Cesare?’

She closed the door and stood thinking. The word was only a half-jest, for she had more than once breathed a wish to enlist a socialist on her side; to hear at least what his party had to suggest for the mending of matters which seemed beyond the reach of others. If she could see—if she could soften Cesare!—and being a woman and young, she never doubted that softening would follow the seeing—if, perhaps, she might indirectly help him, so lifting away the unpleasant remembrance of having once made him suffer unjustly! Half reluctantly she called Nina.

‘Where shall I find Cesare—Cesare Bandinelli, you know?’

‘Where?’ echoed Nina. ‘*Chi lo sa!* Wherever there is mischief.’

‘Is he at the same place?’

‘No, eccellenza.’

‘I want to see him.’

‘Such as he are better left undisturbed.’

The little Viterbo woman knew perfectly where he had gone, but she would have fenced for an hour and not let it out. And there was a touch of disquiet in her manner.

‘Then I must ask Peppina?’

‘Peppina may know. Yes, eccellenza, that is true,’ returned Nina. She reflected that Peppina would probably also keep her knowledge to herself. ‘It is certain she may know.’

Teresa made no further attempt. She went down the stairs and out into the sun. Her heart grew gay as she felt the warm blessed glow and saw the clear bright colours of the South. She was going to the Maxwells’ hotel, but made a round on purpose to breathe the light air, and to have a look at a

vegetable shop which she wanted to paint, where lettuces, tomatoes, green peas, carrots, rings of endive, orange flesh of gourds, glowed out of a cavernous darkness. Then she dawdled round and up the Spanish steps, greeted by smiles from the models and importunities from creatures just out of babyhood—all faded olive greens and blues, rags, and enchanting smiles, with a violet or two twisted shamelessly up for sale—until she had passed her own street again, and reached the Maxwells' hotel.

‘Is Peppina in?’ she asked, after paying a decent tribute of attention to Mary Maxwell's latest grievances.

‘Not she! She always has something to buy or to ask about. It seems to me that is all I pay her for. Why do you ask?’

‘I want to hear of her Cesare.’

‘Well, she never begrudges talk, I'll say that for her,’ said Mrs. Maxwell, with a lazy laugh. ‘I'm not so sure

that she tells you very much, when all's said and done.'

'If she's loyal, I like her the better.'

'Hum! She's in love. Whether loyalty comes in—However, you'd better tell me what you'd like to know.'

And she listened in silence while Donna Teresa hastily touched on her perplexities.

'You see, Mary,' she ended—'you see you must allow two points. Help is wanted, and it ought to be wise help. What is wise help?'

'You poor thing! If you go about asking that question of all your friends, you will soon have picked up a basketful of ill-assorted scraps. I can't imagine any two of them agreeing.'

Mrs. Maxwell's shrewd common-sense represented a bucket of water dashed on Teresa's flame. But she would not give in.

'Scraps are better than nothing,' she

retorted. ‘And Cesare is certainly no friend.’

‘No-o,’ said Mrs. Maxwell, drawling the word, and throwing a log on the fire. Then she sat up and said with decision, ‘If I were you, I would have nothing to do with Cesare.’

‘Why, he’s my chief hope,’ laughed Teresa. ‘So please, Mary, make out from Peppina where he is to be found, or, better still, get her to persuade him to come to speak to me. He must have forgiven me by this time.’

‘I wouldn’t trust him,’ replied Mrs. Maxwell, shaking her small head. ‘Remember, he’s a Sicilian.’

‘And what has that to do with it? What do you expect him to do to me? Oh, Mary, really this is too absurd !’

‘Very well. Only don’t say you weren’t warned,’ returned the other huffily. ‘What is it that I am to ask? Oh, the man’s address. As if he had one !’

But she made no more remonstrances, and indeed exerted herself so far as to question Peppina that evening. Peppina answered volubly, and flung in much extraneous matter. There was no better workman, no one so clever, so handsome, so ill-used in all Rome. It was because he did not bribe the police that they were hard on him. Others did what they liked, and made it square ; but Cesare was too honourable for such ways, and suffered in consequence, poor fellow ! She grew guarded the instant Teresa's desire was touched upon. If it had been the signora, now—Cesare had once seen her, and had ever since called her Peppina's beautiful signora. Mrs. Maxwell believed this to be a lie ; yet was pleased by it.

' You had better persuade him,' she said.

' Sissignora, but why ? Is there money to be had ? '

' I daresay. Yes, I am sure there is.

The marchesa is likely to pay well for whatever she asks him to undertake.'

'Sissignora, I will do all that is possible. I will try to see him some day when you do not want me.'

And she was in earnest. She always wanted Cesare to make money, and she thought if he could but have something to spare for the lottery, he might draw such a fortune as had fallen to a crier of the *Tribuna* only a few months earlier. With this idea in her head she resolved to use all her powers of persuasion, and believed in success, because it was not Donna Teresa whom he hated so much as Wilbraham.

But Wilbraham, meanwhile, had heard of the scheme.

Teresa, who at this time tried to be very cordial with him, spoke that evening of her visit to the Maxwells. A wind was blowing with unusual strength for Rome, banging shutters and driving rainy gusts against the glass.

Sylvia was nervously afraid of a thunder-storm, and asked many times whether Wilbraham heard thunder, so many times that Teresa brought in Cesare as a diversion, making a jest of her intended efforts to tame him. Wilbraham did not say much in reply—he could hold his tongue when he liked—but he listened intently, and the next morning, while the rain was still falling heavily, and tumbling in sheets from broad eaves on the passers-by, he in his turn made his way to the Maxwells.

‘She must not be allowed to employ that man,’ he ended emphatically, after an explanation.

Colonel Maxwell pulled his moustache.

‘Must not?’ He laughed.

‘Must not,’ Wilbraham insisted.

‘I suppose it’s hard on the poor beggar if nobody is to give him a leg up.’

‘That’s not Teresa’s affair,’ said his wife severely. ‘I quite agree—fully—

with Mr. Wilbraham. Teresa is so impulsive that she has to be protected against herself. Of course she ought not to be hand and glove with socialists and murderers.'

'That's it,' said Wilbraham, delighted. 'And you think you can stop it?'

'Think? I am sure. Five lire will stop anything with Peppina. But it really is folly of Teresa.'

'Perhaps. But a generous folly.'

Wilbraham spoke hastily. Mrs. Maxwell leaned back in her chair, and tapped the table with her fingers.

'Well, it has its inconveniences,' she remarked drily. 'Sylvia is not like that. Sylvia would never rush into extravagances without first consulting some one.'

He stood up, tall and stiff.

'They are different,' he said guardedly.

'Oh, yes—they are different.'

Mary Maxwell, who loved playing with fire so long as she did not burn her own fingers, laughed as she spoke, and afterwards enlarged on the subject to her husband.

‘I,’ she said, ‘give him a month—one month. Every one has acted idiotically in supposing that poor little Sylvia could hold an affection, and now—see !’

‘No one asked him to fall in love. You make him out a wretched cur,’ returned Colonel Maxwell, from behind the sheets of the *Times*.

‘If Teresa did not ask him, she managed that it should be easy ; always dressing up that poor little goose in borrowed plumes. Heavens ! Imagine being tied for life to a bundle of platitudes ! *You can’t*, you know ; but then you ought not to have left me to say it,’ she said, perching herself on the arm of his chair.

‘Go along ! I’m reading Christie’s sale.’

‘ You needn’t suppose *you’re* ever going to have a Christie sale. Well, if you’re so unsociable, I shall go and speak at once to Peppina. Do you hear ? ’

A grunt replied. In fact he did not hear, or might have offered sound advice. As it was, Mrs. Maxwell was both anxious to impress the girl, and to have it over quickly, so that she did not linger at preliminaries. Peppina answered her call with yards of frilling in her hands.

‘ About Cesare,’ Mrs. Maxwell began.
‘ Have you seen him yet ? ’

‘ Signora ! By your favour ! And with all this to be done before night ! ’

She held up her frills.

‘ Then you need not go.’

‘ Need not go ? Per Bacco, but what has changed, signora ? ’

‘ The marchesa will not require Cesare, that is all,’ said Mrs. Maxwell carelessly.

Peppina was looking hard at her, and there was a queer glitter in her eyes. She had been dreaming through the night of the lottery and possible riches, and she immediately connected Wilbraham's visit with her disappointment. There was, however, no use in talking.

'I am sorry, signora,' she said, drawing a deep angry breath. 'It would have been good for the poor fellow.'

'He will find something better to do.'

'In Rome!' The girl flung out her hands with a gesture of hopelessness which made Mrs. Maxwell uncomfortable.

'Really, Peppina,' she said pettishly, 'as you have not told him, I can't see that there is much harm done. If I give you five lire for him, he ought to be delighted.'

'The signora is always so generous!' said Peppina. Her fingers closed round

the note, but her eyes had not lost their dangerous gleam, and her face was pale. Mrs. Maxwell, quite satisfied with herself, went away, wondering, it must be confessed, how Teresa would bear this interruption of her plans for the good of mankind. But she thought if they all opposed her wish to enlist Cesare, that she would yield, especially because, for Sylvia's sake, she avoided anything which Wilbraham appeared particularly to dislike.

Peppina went that evening to the house of a sister-in-law near the Piazza Navona, and sent a child to seek for Cesare. When he came, she made a sign that she wished to speak to him alone, and they went out into the piazza. The south wind fluttered warmly, and the sky was thick with stars. She told her story quickly, holding back Donna Teresa's name, because she had never been sure that he would have worked for her. As it was, he only heard

that a chance had been snatched from him.

‘It was the Englishman, I know it!’ cried Peppina. ‘You were quite right. He hates you.’

‘I will be even with him one day,’ said Cesare in a low fierce voice.

‘He came to the house in all that rain ; they talked—talked—I heard them. And as soon as he had gone, in comes the signora to me. She thought herself so clever, because she did not say his name. As if I were a fool !’

Peppina’s voice was passionately contemptuous. They had turned out of the piazza and were passing along the narrow street at the end of which is Pasquino’s mutilated figure.

‘I will be even with him,’ repeated Cesare.

‘There was money in it, English money, too, which is better. And now Angelo suffers as well.’

‘Have I not said that I will be even

with him? Do not throw words about,' he exclaimed, turning sharply on her. 'My blood is hot enough without your putting fire to it.'

'Eh—and those are my thanks!' cried the girl, flinging from him.

He made no answer, and they walked sullenly abreast of each other till they had passed the tragic block of the Cancellaria where Rossi was killed. Then Peppina drew nearer, glancing from time to time at her lover.

'What shall you do?' she said at last in a low voice.

He did not answer her directly.

'You can find out where he goes, what he does?' he said at last.

'From one or the other—yes.'

'He leaves Rome perhaps for Naples?'

'Perhaps. I do not know. But not yet.'

'I can wait,' he said significantly.

They relapsed into silence again,

walking in the shadows. It was Pep-pina who at last spoke again. Cesare's life was so solitary that he felt little need of speech. All the money he could earn was spent on Angelo, and in providing himself with the barest neces-saries of life. He was never seen in a wine-shop.

'I will go to that Nina of those people in the Porta Pinciana,' said the girl. 'The Englishman marries one of them, and she will chatter like a mag-pie if I let her. It will please you if I find out, eh, Cesare mio ?'

She touched his arm softly with her finger as she spoke, and turned up her face to his. He stooped and kissed her.

'I have told you,' he said briefly. But she missed a passionate ring in his voice for which she hungered.

'I believe you are thinking only of the Englishman,' she said with reproach.

'That is true,' he allowed simply.

‘He fills my being. There seems no room for anything else, not even for you. You must wait, Peppina.’

If it had been a woman of whom he spoke, her wild blood would have carried her away. But she understood and could sympathise when he only meant revenge. It seemed quite natural to her.

‘I will wait,’ she said. ‘Yes.’

CHAPTER IX

MRS. MAXWELL confessed herself to Teresa on their way back from church the next morning. Teresa had a momentary anger, but, as the other had said, she was very anxious to consider Wilbraham at this time, and contented herself with a passing outbreak of indignation.

‘ You are absolutely ridiculous, all of you ! Supposing the man to be what you say, what possible harm can be done by my speaking to him ? I’ve a great mind to find him out on my own account. I have only to go to the questura.’

‘ You won’t,’ said Mrs. Maxwell confidently.

And she did not. It appeared as if Wilbraham would be annoyed, and for Sylvia's sake she must walk warily with Wilbraham. Only in the Palace of the Cæsars, that afternoon, she allowed herself a little mockery towards him.

'So you've been undermining my projects,' she said gaily. 'Did you expect me to be so meek as to give in?'

He flushed.

'I expected you to be annoyed,' he said.

'Why didn't you tell me yourself?'

'Would that have influenced you?'

'Why not?' returned Teresa, surprised. She went on very gently—'I hope, if only for Sylvia's sake, that we shall always be friends.'

'Did you call me?' said Sylvia, looking round.

Teresa put out her hand to her and smiled.

'I call you now, at any rate,' she said. 'I was talking about you.'

‘And when Walter and I are together, he likes to talk of you,’ said the girl happily.

Teresa smiled, thinking only that she was found useful to fill up blank spaces in the conversation. Love might idealise Sylvia, but could hardly go so far as to conjure interest into her talk. Not looking at Wilbraham, she was quite unconscious of his embarrassment, and returned to her subject.

‘Mary and you both seem to think Cesare a dangerous man? Now I believe that sort of wild talk is mere froth.’

‘I don’t know. It may be,’ said Wilbraham, recovering himself with difficulty. ‘I daresay he is not really dangerous, but somehow I don’t like the fellow. I don’t care for you to have to do with him——’

He checked himself, and Teresa waited, expecting him to say more. As he was still silent, she remarked thoughtfully and with a slight hesitation—

'It is so difficult for us to throw ourselves into these foreign natures. We insist on judging them by our own standards. Yet'—she laughed and broke off—'I find it dreadfully hard to have one standard for myself and another for other people, don't you?'

It is doubtful whether Wilbraham had ever attempted it. What he did not approve of he banned. But he was not thinking of this.

'One knows what is right, I'm sure, always,' said Sylvia, trying to keep up with the talk.

'You do, dear, for yourself, I think, always,' Teresa returned quickly, looking at her kindly. 'And what is more, you would do it. Now I wish he would say something nice,' she said to herself, glancing at Wilbraham. He was looking straight ahead, apparently he had not even heard, and she began to beat her brains, going back to the subject of characteristics. 'When you

think of it,' she said, 'there is something remarkable in a race of their standing remaining in many ways so child-like.'

'Very remarkable,' said Wilbraham grimly. 'Last summer they chose to be affronted because the band in the Colonna played Wagner oftener than pleased their patriotism, so they just fell on the poor chaps, wrecked the stand, and tore the music into atoms. Nice sensible proceeding!'

'I think I've heard of just as sensible in London and Paris,' retorted Teresa in a smooth voice. 'Would you like me to mention a few instances?'

He looked at her and they both laughed. More softly still, she put in one further word—

'Other people's folly is so *very* foolish!'

'*I* think some of the books one reads are very foolish,' Sylvia proclaimed.

‘They talk about things which couldn’t possibly happen, just as if they were real. So silly !’

Wilbraham quickly looked away.

‘It is provoking, sometimes,’ said Teresa. ‘One gets mixed, at least I do.’

She glanced at Wilbraham, not at all understanding what was in his mind, but wishing that he would be more genial, more natural. Certainly she was getting nervous herself, for she had never been so conscious of Sylvia’s deficiencies. They had never before seemed sufficiently important to weigh against her beauty and sweetness. Now the little prosaic vague speeches disturbed her quite unduly.

She put herself yet more on the defensive.

They wandered round that imperial hill where memories jostle each other, and even under the divinely blue Roman sky great angry ghosts rise and

stare at the petty intruders whom, in life, one hand-wave would have swept away. They sat on a bank, where, behind them, towered the brick fragment which may have looked on the trial of an apostle, and, before, lay that little space of crowded ruin of which each stone holds history. Teresa, foolish short-sighted Teresa, thinking only how best to shield and show off another, was at her best and brightest, touched each point with delicate fancies, twisted Sylvia's inanities into playfulness, was delightful towards Wilbraham. She was a little surprised at last when he sprang up.

'I must be off,' he said briefly. 'Look here; shall I put you into a carriage, or do you mean to stop longer?'

'Oh, we will go,' answered Teresa, reflecting ruefully that she could not have been very successful in her valiant attempts to make the afternoon pleasant

to him, when he ended it in such an abrupt fashion. But Sylvia drove home in excellent spirits.

'I like you to come with us, because Walter likes to talk to you,' she said cheerily. 'You understand him better now, don't you? I know he enjoyed himself this afternoon.'

'I expect he always enjoys himself when you are there.'

'Yes, of course,' the girl answered serenely. 'He doesn't say much, but I talk.'

Teresa was silent. Presently her sister began again.

'Teresa, Mary says that people who marry are sometimes very unhappy. She says you were unhappy.'

'Mary!' exclaimed Teresa angrily.
'Mary says a great deal!'

'But were you?' Sylvia persisted.

'Yes.'

The marchesa kept her face turned away.

‘Why, I wonder? Did you love him?’

‘Yes, at first.’

‘Did he love you?’

‘I thought so,’ said Teresa with difficulty.

There was a pause.

‘I don’t think I understand,’ said Sylvia slowly. ‘Don’t people always know?’

The carriage rattled over rough stones and tram lines.

‘No,’ said Teresa. ‘Not always.’

‘How funny! *I* know.’

‘I hope you will be very fortunate, dear,’ replied her sister, looking wistfully at her, and again over-estimating the power of the sweet face. ‘I think you will.’

‘Of course,’ Sylvia answered happily. ‘You see, Walter told me that he was fond of me, so I know. I suppose some people only imagine things? You must have imagined. Poor Teresa;

and I wonder how you could ! I think I should have found out.'

Donna Teresa that night stood looking from her window. Above the houses, Orion, brave hunter, strode across the sky, his dog at his heels, and soft fleecy clouds flying before him. For midwinter the air was extraordinarily mild. Sylvia's innocent words had stirred gnawing memories, which never altogether left her. How miserable she had been ! What humiliations she had endured ! It had been in a certain measure her remembrance of this, and her dread lest Sylvia's face should attract another marchese, which had made her, perhaps, unduly anxious for the solid, unromantic engagement with Wilbraham to come about. She had weighed and judged him. She thought him cold, unsympathetic, reserved, yet was sure he might be trusted, and never had the least doubt that he knew his own mind, and would keep to it. Why was not this still

sufficient for her? At times it was, and at all times she fell back upon it for support. But there were moments when she could not convince herself, when in comparison with other women—never with herself—poor Sylvia's limitations stared at her. Then she flung herself into the gap. Then, as this afternoon, she dug into her own stores, brought forth all her powers, exerted herself, covered Sylvia, and never once thought that here lay danger. On the contrary, she believed that she often failed, and laughed ruefully at the remembrance of Wilbraham's sudden movement of escape.

But if it were all in vain! If he were beginning to realise a dreadful mistake! If before Sylvia there lay long unloved years, and before Wilbraham the heavy weight of weary disappointment—what then?

And all Teresa's reflections ended in this. *If*—what then?

CHAPTER X

PEPPINA, Mrs. Maxwell's maid, having, as she often had, a note to take to the Marchesa di Sant' Eustachio, turned in for some words with Nina, now promoted to the position of head of the kitchen, with a staff of two assistants, whom she governed merrily. The kitchen was still untidy. Assunta smilingly dragged out a chair from behind a barricade of heaped baskets ; Fernanda, showing her white teeth, bore away in her arms a huge brown jar of vinegar. Nina had not been content until she had got two or three of these jars from Viterbo, of coarse highly-glazed pottery, with a fine free design of yellow on the brown.

She now pointed out her treasure to Peppina with joyous pride.

'And our marchesa has two in the sala with all her other beautiful things'—Nina exalted her family to the skies—'she took them away from me and left me nothing for the wine. But that, see you, was because she could find nothing like them in Rome. Rome is a poor place, for all they talk so much, and make one pay, pay, pay. Eh-h-h-h-h ! Blessed Virgin, whether one has to pay ! Spinach, *tre soldi*, onions, *due soldi*, a slice of gourd, a pepperino—I ask you what a pepperino is worth ? Well, believe it or not, that great Mariaccia—daughter of a Jew I call her—when she brought her basket this morning, she asked *quattro soldi* ! *Quattro soldi* !—Fernanda, child, there is the bell, fly ! Here, stay ! Take off thy apron, which the signora said should only be worn in the kitchen—the saints alone know why—and remember to say, "*Buon giorno, eccellenza.*"

—*Quattro soldi, Peppina mia*, true as that I sit here, and at Viterbo—ah, at Viterbo they do not rob like that.'

'It is true,' said Peppina, sighing.
'In Rome it is hard to live.'

'But not for you. You are like me.
Eh-h-h-h-h ! It was a good day for
me when Signora Bianco at the laundry
told me these angels wanted a donna.'

Peppina still looked gloomy.

'Why should you be their donna ?
Why should some have so much money,
and others none at all ?'

Nina's funny little face squeezed itself
into innumerable lines as she nodded her
head sagaciously.

'Ah, that is Cesare, eh ? That is
what he says.'

'Yes,' acknowledged the other, glanc-
ing at her. 'That is what Cesare says.
And he is very clever. All the world
knows that he is very clever ?'

'Perhaps,' returned Nina, shutting
her mouth obstinately. 'But, see here,

how much good has he done himself with his cleverness ?'

'Because he is always thinking of others. You do not understand—no one understands !' cried the girl passionately. She sprang up and stood leaning against the table, her breast heaving, her splendid eyes on fire. 'He is not working for himself, he is not working for you or for me, or for this one or for that—it is for the whole world. When he comes and talks to me of his thoughts, his plans, he seems'—she flung out her hands—'to set the whole of me in a blaze.'

'Eh-h-h-h-h !' Nina's shrewd little eyes narrowed. 'The whole world. And you like that ?'

'Who would not ?'

'Not I.'

'You ! You !'

Peppina's look rested on her with a touch of contempt, but Nina's gay laugh bubbled on.

‘If I were you I should not care to share all these good things which Cesare is going to get, with—Elena Cianchetti, for instance.’

The girl started as if she had been stung.

‘The Cianchetti ! She is a viper.’

Nina nodded her head, and began to wash her lettuces.

‘Perhaps. But Cesare did not always think her a viper.’

‘Oh !’ Peppina flung out her hands, flung her rival and the whole world on one side. ‘If he spoke to her, I could kill him. But he will not.’

‘It seems to me that when we are going to do good to everybody, there are always a few we mean to leave out. Perhaps, in that way we should all be left out. Who knows ?’ remarked the philosopher, still nodding like a mandarin. The girl’s socialism had received a check. Nina glanced at her and turned the subject. ‘The English

signore, who will marry our signorina, his leg is not well yet, after all these long days. It is because he travelled on a Tuesday—an unlucky day.'

'Ah!' said Peppina indifferently. She was always alert when Wilbraham was spoken of, because Cesare had ordered her to bring him what news she could, but she was well on her guard against betraying special interest to her present companion, and she no longer talked to Mrs. Maxwell. 'So it is true they are to be married?'

'True? Did I not tell you?'

'I had forgotten,' lied the girl. 'She is pretty.'

'As pretty and as innocent as the angels. And our marchesa, who has grown suddenly very rich, would give her everything in the world if she wished it.'

'If your marchesa is rich, I would have chosen her if I had been the Englishman.'

'She might not have said yes,' returned Nina with a snort. 'She has had enough of what you all think the most wonderful thing you can get. Eh-h-h-h-h, my Pietro was not the worst, though he will need many masses to give him a little ease, that is certain; but after he had been to the wine-shop—(*Fernanda, figlia mia*, slip out and buy some fresh ricotta for the signora, it pleases her)—and I had to do my work with a black eye and a swelled face, *ecco!*'—Nina's eyebrows, shoulders, hands, shot up expressively—'I do not want another Pietro. And our marchesa is like me.'

'Did he beat her?' asked Peppina, stretching herself and yawning. She was still thinking of Elena Cianchetti, and she wished to get back and brood upon Nina's words, but she reflected that the best way of binding Cesare to herself was to be useful to him. She loved him passionately, and would have

been unscrupulous towards any one who stood between them.

‘Those people do not give black eyes. They strike at hearts, and that hurts worse.’

‘Yes,’ said the girl comprehendingly, looking at the older woman, and surprised that such knowledge had come to her. ‘Yes, it does. But the signorina, she does not fear?’

‘The English are different.’

‘Yes, they are cold—hard,’ cried Peppina passionately. ‘They go on their way without caring. Yes, that is what——’

She stopped. She had been going to quote Cesare, and he had always warned her to keep his name out of the way when she was trying to pick up information for him. But, quick as she was, Nina was quicker, and had no difficulty in reading what had so nearly escaped her lips. It made her angry.

'It is easy to call white black,' she said sharply.

'And they have voices—ee-ee-ee—like little canary birds,' mimicked the girl contemptuously. Her own voice was harsh, and the other flung a withering glance at her.

'That is better than to scream like a jay.'

'Well, I do not like them.'

'I should think not.'

'Why?' asked the girl, suddenly suspicious, and conscious that she had let her temper sweep her farther than she intended.

'Because if you liked them you would be grateful, eh? And gratitude is as rare as a white ant. *Ecco!*'

Nina smoothed out her skirts and flirted some water towards her lettuces, spilling a good deal over Peppina in the process. She was always horribly untidy. Peppina looked angrily at her, and drew her skirts out of the wet. She hesitated

whether to go away in a rage, or to linger and try to hear something more definite. Fernanda's return, carrying on green leaves a great piece of the snow-white ricotta (curd of sheep's milk), and in her other hand a stick of spiked arbutus berries, relieved the tension.

'It is for our marchesà,' she said proudly, exhibiting the scarlet berries.

'Do they stay all the winter?' asked Peppina, knowing this to be one of the points on which Cesare was curious, and so swallowing her displeasure.

'Who knows? They do as they like,' returned Nina. 'All the forestieri do as they like, and why should ours be different?'

'Perhaps they will go to Naples?'

'Perhaps, or to Sicily,' said the older woman, looking keenly at her. 'In that case——'

'Yes?' said Peppina, eagerly leaning forward.

'Cesare might tell them a little about the Mafia. Eh?'

The girl drew suddenly back, her face white. It took her a minute to recover herself.

'The Mafia? What is that?' she said, trying to speak carelessly and failing, for her voice shook.

'Who knows? Ask Cesare.—Assunta, in there, will you never have done with those unfortunate dishes? Go, Fernanda, go and see if she is sleeping.'

Peppina went away quickly. She told herself that she would be very careful not to mention the word Mafia to Cesare, as he would be sure to think she had been in some way to blame for its name having been so much as breathed. Those who have to do with such secret societies as the Camorra or the Mafia do not talk of them, and to the ignorant world the names convey a theatrical rather than a real meaning. This does

not prevent their existing, and in a more extended network than we might conceive possible. The Mafia, indeed, exists, and has existed since the time of the Moors in Sicily, when, law and justice being unattainable, the secret society was formed to apply them in a rough and ready fashion. Then it was probably useful ; now it serves only for private revenge. And as private revenge is an unfailing incentive, a society which allows its members to strike, and then protects it by the terror of its name, will never want adherents or the help of the devil.

Peppina was not thinking of all this as she went back to the hotel, swinging her body from the hips with the free lithe gait of a Trastevere woman. She was only reflecting how she could best adapt the little she had gathered from Nina to Cesare's wishes. Her love for him was passionate, but it was so largely mixed with fear—particularly since that

dark episode in his life—that it was doubtful which excitement was at any time uppermost. She lied to him as readily as to any one else, only she took more care not to be found out. As she reached the end of the Sistina she stopped to buy a few hot chestnuts, and Cesare at the same moment came up the Tritone.

‘Did I startle you?’ he said, taking the chestnuts she held out to him.

‘No; why should you?’ asked the girl simply. ‘Am I not always thinking of you? Where are you going?’

‘To the station to meet a man.’

‘I will walk with you,’ she said, turning to cross the sunny piazza by his side. ‘Those people do not want me.’

‘No,’ said Cesare bitterly. ‘They pay for what they do not want, so that we who want have nothing with which to pay. And your priests tell you that is right!’

'Do not let us talk of the priests,' said the girl, hastily crossing herself unseen to him. Acts were not much, but it always frightened her to hear him speak against religion. To get him away from this subject she was ready to invent freely. 'I have been with that Nina—over there,' and she flung her dark head on one side in the direction from whence she had come, 'and I have heard something.'

'Ah!' The 'Ah' was greedy. He had brooded over Wilbraham's high-handedness until he had come to see in him a representative of the injustices which he maintained society had inflicted upon him, and he hated the Englishman with a hatred out of all proportion with his wrongs.

'She is a poor idiot,' Peppina went on contemptuously, 'without ideas. But she talks.'

Cesare nodded. If any one had noticed they might have observed that

he never now flung out a word against women.

‘She talks of her angels. They are all angels with her. And I think they are going away. Not now, but later. I believe it will be to Naples or Sicily.’

‘Good !’ he cried, and her heart gave a leap of delight at seeing his eyes brighten. The next moment he turned on her. ‘You did not tell her it was I who wanted to know ?’

‘*Altro !*’ exclaimed the girl indignantly. ‘Am I a fool ? I did not even ask the question myself. I tell you she talks. But you are pleased, dear one ?’ she went on, her voice changing into deep tenderness.

He stretched his hands to her, and they stood still for an instant looking into each other’s eyes. The warm sunlight was round them ; by their side a man was urging his miserable overladen mule up the Tolentino hill with the long ‘A-a-a-a-a-o-o !’ which had

been the cry of his forefathers in the old amphitheatre days. For a moment Peppina let herself go, dizzy with almost intolerable delight, the next a thought stung her, the more sharply for this very delight ; she held back from him and cried passionately—

‘When did you see the Cianchetti?’

‘The Cianchetti !’ He was surprised and displeased, so that he flushed under the girl’s piercing look. But he looked back at her. ‘At her window this morning,’ he said unhesitatingly.

‘This morning !’

Peppina was pale as death, and trembling all over. Her burning eyes put the question so insistently that he answered as if she had spoken—

‘Why do you ask ? She is nothing to me.’

The girl told too many lies herself to recognise truth in others. His words brought back the blood from her heart, and to a certain extent relieved

her. But she did not quite believe, although she pretended that she did. She was going to strike out at Nina, and say that she had accused him, when she remembered that she had just denied mentioning his name.

'I knew you had seen her. I felt it here,' she answered, pressing her heart.
'But of course if you say that——'

'When do they go to Sicily?' he demanded presently, reverting to a more absorbing topic.

'Who knows? They don't say. It will be in the spring no doubt.'

He nodded. She looked at him and thought he was thinner than ever.

'Cesare! Is there nothing? Is there no hope?'

He laughed grimly.

'*Ma che!* Of course there is hope. That is always left, though it grows mouldy with time. They have promised me something on the *Avanti* staff. And besides'—his eyes kindled

—‘there may be a great stroke struck before long.’

‘What stroke? Tell me.’

‘No, no, carina,’ he said, not unkindly. ‘There will be no telling.’

She reflected.

‘Cesare, truly, what have you eaten to-day?’

‘Your chestnuts.’

She was turning out her pocket the next moment and pressing a five lire note upon him.

‘Blessed Virgin, that it should be so bad as that! But the saints themselves sent me out with this in my pocket. Cesare, caro, you shall! For Angelo, for Angelo!’

He had pushed it away with almost violence, but at this appeal looked down at it, and his hand hesitated. Peppina saw her advantage.

‘The child must be hungry, and it is so bad for a child to be hungry. Take it, take it!’

He caught her wrist.

‘Peppina, swear. Is it your own?’

‘Is it my own! Whose else should it be? Yes, yes, yes, I tell you!’

He drew a long breath.

‘I had begun to think of a pan of charcoal. There seemed nothing else, only there were one or two affairs I wanted to have arranged first.’

‘Now you will get food?’

‘Yes.’

‘For you both. Promise.’

‘I promise.’

The Sant’ Angelo gun boomed out, and all the church bells began to clang. Peppina stood still.

‘I must go,’ she said, ‘*A rivederti.*’ She wanted to say that the Cianchetti could not have done so well for him, but she was afraid, and hurried away down the Venti Settembre. She swung along, her heart full of Cesare, and hot tears in her eyes. ‘He has so many enemies, this Englishman and all,’ she

cried vehemently, ‘and only me on his side. A pan of charcoal ! Oh, it would kill me ! What should I have done if the signora had not given me that money for the washing ? Madonna santissima, I will carry a candle to thee at Sant’ Agostino this very day.’ So she went on with her thoughts, a medley of passionate love, jealousy, and fear, until she reached the hotel and went upstairs. At the door of the Maxwell’s sala she paused. ‘I shall say I lost it,’ she remarked cheerfully. ‘Madonna santissima, *two* candles !’

CHAPTER XI

A COUPLE of months passed without apparent change. To Wilbraham they had seemed to drag like lead, yet, looking back, their swiftness appalled him. The wedding would be after Easter, and now that the new year had come, it brought a date which had been remote, measurably nearer. He had gone through a bad fierce time of repulsion, of anger with his own amazing folly, with fate, with everything and everybody, with Sylvia worst of all. Then pride had come to his aid, and he determined resolutely to make the best of the situation. The strong pride of a very self-controlled man was able to do

this more thoroughly than he had even hoped. He set his teeth now and then to avoid showing irritation at Sylvia's futile remarks, but he always had succeeded in keeping under outward signs of impatience, and devoutly trusted that the power would never fail him. He was helped along by the girl's own contentment. She asked so little ! On the other hand this very trait sometimes annoyed him, for in the moments when the desire to break his bonds grew all but overpowering, he felt that the little he gave could not for a day have satisfied another woman.

What was really a sign of danger, if only he had recognised it, was, that in spite of his increasing dread of his marriage, he did not dislike his hours in the Porta Pinciana. Teresa, in her fear for the wreck of Sylvia's happiness, told herself that she must take care he did not dislike them. She was not a vain woman. The failure of her marriage

had knocked any belief in her own charms out of her, and left only an exaggerated conviction of the immense power of beauty. It never entered her head that a constant contrast between her quick, clever, and sympathetic talk and poor Sylvia's platitudes might be perilous. She did not think of Wilbraham on her own account at all, only and entirely as affecting Sylvia, although she had liked him better since the day at Assisi. Once or twice she had looked critically at him, and said to herself that his face had gained something in losing an expression of cool superiority, which used to annoy her. He was not handsome—his chin was too square, his nose too thick, his hair too straight ; but there was strength in every movement, and she was sure he might be trusted. She dwelt much on that quality, at times, when she looked anxiously at Sylvia. For she had her anxieties, sometimes trying to set them

at rest for ever, by questioning the girl in a roundabout way.

‘There’s nothing you want, Sylvia?’

‘Yes,’ said the girl, ‘I want a little wool if you are going out.’

‘We must begin to think of the clothes—the important clothes,’ said Teresa with a laugh, but watching her all the time. ‘I mean you to have yours from Paris.’

‘There is no good in wasting money,’ Sylvia returned practically. ‘Why do people always think they must do that when they marry? It’s silly.’

‘Well, one isn’t married every day of one’s life,’ pleaded the marchesa. Suddenly she said, with a quick change of voice, ‘Dear, you do want to marry your Walter, don’t you?’

‘Of course!’ The girl stared blankly in her face. ‘When people are engaged, of course they marry. How funny you are, Teresa!’

‘Well, then,’ cried the other gaily,

‘none of your horrid little economical scruples for me ! What’s the good of having more money than I know what to do with, if one mayn’t spend it ? I shall order the frocks, and they shall be lovely.’

‘I think you had better consult Walter.’

‘Then I won’t. He can dress you after you are married ; I shall do it before. Tell him so, if you like.’

‘Oh, we don’t talk of dress.’

‘What *do* you talk of ?’ asked Teresa with sudden curiosity.

‘I—I don’t know,’ vaguely. ‘I think—sometimes—places.’

The young marchesa who believed in romance, though her own was ended, looked at her anxiously.

‘Is that all ?’

‘It’s a good deal. You can’t think how much there seems to say about Rome. And besides, he reads the newspaper.’

‘Oh !’ cried Teresa sharply.

‘I don’t care about newspapers, generally, of course,’ Sylvia went on, with her little air of finality, ‘but I like him to read them, because I can knit all the time, and count the stitches. One needn’t always attend.’

On the whole there was not much comfort to be got out of this conversation, except that the girl was quite unruffled by doubts. Teresa would have liked to have been as sure of Wilbraham, for her sympathies were too lively not to have often alarmed her. She tried to close her eyes, and to make the house as pleasant as she could for him, succeeding only too well.

‘Let us go to-morrow to Villa Madama,’ she said one Friday evening. Fernanda, with her broad smile, had just brought in the coffee, a log fire burnt merrily in the open stove, from the street rose a stir of voices, cracking of whips, cries of ‘*Tribuna ! Ecco*

Tribu—u—na !’ ‘ Polenti !’ ‘ Cerini, un sol’, cerini !’ and the great hum of the electric tram, rushing up and down the hill like remorseless fate. ‘ We’ll get the two Maxwells.’

Teresa rose up and stood before the fire, so that its glow fell on her white dress. Mrs. Brodrick moved uneasily in her chair, for she saw that although Wilbraham was sitting on a sofa beside Sylvia, he was watching Teresa.

‘ I don’t know if Mary can come, but I am sure she would like it.’

‘ Then,’ said Wilbraham, ‘ she will. She always does what she likes.’

‘ She does what she likes,’ agreed Mrs. Brodrick smiling, ‘ but she doesn’t always like what she does.’

‘ Who does ? ’ Wilbraham said, with a queer quick ring in the question. Teresa caught it, and twisted the conversation.

‘ Colonel Maxwell picked up a Garofalo to-day—signed and all.’

‘Then he will be happy for a week,’ said her grandmother.

‘Unless Mary shakes him out of his convictions. It’s idiotic of her, but she says she can’t help it after a day’s ravings.’

‘Idiotic,’ repeated Wilbraham.

‘What’s idiotic?’ asked Sylvia, standing up by the lamp to recover a dropped stitch.

There was a momentary pause.

‘To open a man’s eyes to his mistakes, so long as he’s pleased. It’s so unnecessary,’ Wilbraham answered sharply.

‘Then what ought one to do?’

‘Leave them. He’ll find them out for himself, soon enough.’

Sylvia so rarely took an independent line that they were surprised to see her shaking her head.

‘I’d rather be told,’ she said, still examining her work.

Teresa moved uneasily.

‘Are we to go to the Villa Madama, or not?’ she asked almost sharply. Say yes or no, some one.’

‘We all say yes,’ said Mrs. Brodrick, with something of effort in the words. She, too, had been listening. Teresa went quickly to Sylvia and put her hand on her shoulder, the two young heads bending together.

‘How beautifully you knit!’ cried Teresa, taking the work in her other hand. ‘I can never keep the silk so even. Do you know your fairy godmother must have been an exceedingly neat person?’

Once in her hearing, Wilbraham had inveighed against untidiness.

‘Oh, Teresa, as if anybody ever had a fairy godmother!’

‘Ah, you weren’t brought up on a course of fairy stories, or you’d know better—Sylvia never once told a fib in her life,’ she added to Wilbraham—‘so she wouldn’t listen to anything which

couldn't be guaranteed as true. I was so unscrupulous that I used to take her in whenever I could.'

'Teresa, you didn't!' cried the girl, shocked, and turning honest helpless eyes with appeal in them to Wilbraham. Her sister laughed.

'Don't be afraid, I can bear the burden of those sins. Granny, I wish you'd let me burn that horrid sketch you've stuck up there. It's all wrong.'

Sylvia returned to her knitting; Teresa, a slim white figure, hands clasped behind her, had wandered off to stand before an easel in a dim corner. Wilbraham felt an unaccountable longing to make her turn towards him again.

'I saw your Cesare to-day,' he said.

'Did you?' She came quickly out of the shadows, and dropped on a chair. 'Tell me about him, please.'

'There's little to tell. He was talking to a man near the Trevi.'

‘How did he look? Hungry?’

‘Well, yes—poor,’ Wilbraham admitted, ‘and as big a ruffian as ever.’

Teresa glanced at him mischievously.

‘Do you always determine what your eyes mean to see beforehand?’

‘I don’t wear rose-coloured glasses, at any rate.’ He had certainly changed a good deal, for he now liked to spar with her, and his tone was eager.

‘Poor Cesare!’ she sighed. ‘Did he glare?’

‘Like a Trojan.’

‘Well, you can’t expect him to like you.’

‘You might say, *us*.’

‘Oh no,’ she said carelessly. ‘I was the first sinner, I own; but I did try to apologise, and you didn’t. You wounded his——’

‘Vanity,’ put in Wilbraham with a laugh. ‘So be it. I shall have to bear the consequences as best I can.’

Teresa was restless this evening.
She got up again.

‘There’s the ten-o’clock bell.’
‘Does that mean that I’m to go?’ he asked, rising in his turn.
‘It means that I am going.’
‘And to-morrow?’
‘Oh, settle with Sylvia,’ she said impatiently.

They filled two carriages, a big and a little one. Teresa was with Colonel Maxwell in the smaller, and he thought her preoccupied when he thought about it, which was not often. It was true that she did not comment as freely as usual upon what they passed, though masses of lovely flowers were grouped round the Boat fountain, models sat about on the Trinità steps, a man in the piazza was binding together rough and ready brooms for his dust-cart out of a sort of golden ling, a line of scarlet German students lit up the gloomy Babuino, and out in the Popolo they

came upon a blaze of sunshine, hot enough even to warm the heart of the old obelisk.

‘By Jove, when all’s said and done, it’s a fine world !’ commented Colonel Maxwell suddenly.

‘A very tangled one,’ threw back Teresa. ‘I wish you would tell me what to do with it ?’

‘I ?’ he laughed. ‘That’s a largish order. You seem to be doing it tolerably well between you, just at present. A fortune and a wedding all in one winter. Wilbraham’s a very good chap,’ he added, thinking she might require reassurance. ‘He wants knowing, as I daresay you’ve found out, but he’s worth the trouble. And a happy marriage will give him just what he needs to rub off pounds of his mother’s spoiling.’

Teresa hesitated. She was in a perplexed mood, and advice seemed the one thing to help her, as it sometimes seems until we have got it.

'Do you think him clever?' she asked with apparent inconsequence.

'Don't you?'

'I suppose so.'

'Well, if you really ask me, I should put my opinion a bit stronger. Of course he's no ass. He did a lot at college.'

'Oh, those are often the stupidest men!' Teresa said sharply.

'In that case, he's stupid.'

But from the look she turned on him he suddenly realised that she was very much in earnest, and began to speak seriously, while the thought shot through his mind, 'Great Scott! She's ambitious for that poor little nonentity!' He said aloud, 'You know Sir Henry Thurstone by name? He told me last year he believed Wilbraham could do anything he liked, and he doesn't say that sort of thing freely. They're all anxious he should go into Parliament, and I suppose he will when he's once married.'

She kept her eyes fixed on him while he spoke, and while she slowly answered—

‘Of course Sylvia—is not exactly clever.’

‘Well, wives don’t have to be clever,’ said Maxwell, trying to find something that would not sound brutal.

‘No.’

‘And she’s awfully pretty. No doubt about that.’ He went on hurriedly—‘See that wine-cart? A great picturesque blob of colour, isn’t it, with the horse hung all over with red tassels?’

But Donna Teresa was silent. She turned away her head, and did not utter more than a few curt sentences until they all got out at the gate of Villa Madama.

There Maxwell collected his enthusiasms, and forgot his conversation; Wilbraham was taciturn. Not Sylvia’s ignorance, but her incapability of understanding, weighed on him. She might

easily have known nothing of Margaret of Austria, even, conceivably, as little of Charles V. ; it was far more depressing to perceive that when an idea of either was presented to her, she could not grasp it, because there was apparently no substance into which it could sink. In the frescoes and delicate plaster mouldings she saw no beauty, but was aware of damp on the walls and the emptiness of the vast rooms, and wondered whether the white owl nailed against the door meant anything. Wilbraham found himself wincing when he heard her little fatuous remarks. Wincing. It had come to this.

Villa Madama, unfinished, a mere beautiful shell, hangs, as every one knows, on the side of a wooded hill, above the Tiber, and facing the mountains, which on that day had put on their loveliest colours, and lay a dream of soft lilac amethyst against a yet softer sky. Here and there a whiter gleam

marked Tivoli or the near villages, and stretching to the north couched the Leonessa, sheeted with snow. It was from the square melancholy garden behind the house that they looked at these things. Running down the hill before them were grey olives, dotted with olive presses, and close beneath the low wall stretched a great cistern, in which the frogs were croaking. The Villa, facing the east, is soon left by the sun, and the sadness of the garden becomes accentuated. Tall withered campagna-like weeds have filled it, a great cipollino sarcophagus adds to the inexpressibly deserted impression ; even the pretty fountain at the back, where the hill water runs out between moss and ferns, and through a grey elephant's head, is choked into melancholy. And at the far end, flanking an old garden gate, two immense stone figures, battered, grey, mutilated, but still curiously expressive, stand and look

down upon the desolation which belongs to them, and them only, with an air of cynical mockery. Mrs. Maxwell turned her back on them.

'I don't think they're nice,' she said in her soft determined voice. 'Do you?'

Teresa glanced up.

'Why not?' she said. 'They've a very good time of it there, look on, needn't interfere, and needn't feel.'

'That's what I complain of,' said Mrs. Maxwell reflectively. 'It puts them in such an unfairly superior position. Here are we, torn by a dozen petty anxieties; I am sure I am, for I don't in the least know where in Rome to get a decent hat. Now, my dear—just think, what would a hat seem to them?'

Mrs. Brodrick laughed. Mrs. Maxwell talked on.

'Still, I'm not so sure. I don't know that I should like never to be in the dance. And if they do get at all

interested, existence must be so scrappy. There is Sylvia, pretty, and young, and in love. They've seen it all before, a hundred times—isn't this the place for lovers to come?—but don't tell me that the poor grey old things wouldn't be curious to know how it's going on. And it must be so seldom that they get their sequels. No,' she waved her hand to them, Roman fashion, shaking it rapidly, palm downwards—' no, I'm not going to swallow your superior airs. You're dying of jealousy, you'd *like* to know about my hat, and Sylvia's wedding. And you're not one bit superior. You're just like other men, pretending to be cynical, because you can't get what you want, and I see through you. There!' Two minutes later she had hold of Teresa's wrist and was strolling along a weedy path. 'I want to speak to you,' she said.

'What about?' demanded the marchesa quickly.

‘I’m bored,’ said Mrs. Maxwell with gloom. ‘Bored.’

Teresa dropped into ease at once.

‘Here?’

‘Here? Oh no. It’s more serious, bigger. I’ve had too much Rome, too many stones, bricks, sarcophaguses, instructive people. Then I’m not thinking so much of myself as of Jem. Do you wish to see him buy up all the rubbish in the place?’

‘Well, go!’ said Teresa, laughing.

‘And be as dull as ditch-water in some forlorn place! Thank you.’

‘What do you want, then?’

Teresa knew Mary Maxwell of old, and felt sure that she was fully possessed with what she intended to do, although she did not often, as now, admit a personal motive. She was very attractive and spoilt, and had really convinced herself that she made others her first consideration.

‘Look at Sylvia,’ she went on.

‘Sylvia is a girl who shows up better in the country than in these—these very learned places.’

‘Never mind Sylvia,’ said the young marchesa quietly. But she knew it was true.

‘And Sicily is charming.’

‘Are we to go to Sicily then?’

‘Peppina has told me a great deal about it,’ Mrs. Maxwell continued, unheeding, ‘and I know it will be the very place to suit you. Let us go while the almond blossom is out. Next month. There, there — it’s settled ; you’ll all bless me.’

Teresa ended by promising to consult her grandmother. But, in the restless fit which had come upon her, she owned that the idea was pleasant.

CHAPTER XII

‘WASN’T I right? Come, confess that I was right?’.

The question came of course from triumphant Mrs. Maxwell, the centre of a group standing on the steps of the Greek theatre at Taormina. They looked on one side, over the rose-red ruins, at Etna, sweeping magnificently upwards into snow, at his purple slopes, his classic shore, then, facing round, they headed a sea divinely full of light, and saw across it aerial mountain ridges faintly cut against the sky.

‘Oh, you were right,’ said Wilbraham presently. ‘You deserve a splendid chorus in your honour, and this is the place in which to raise it.’

‘There’s a German down there already declaiming Shakespeare to his wife,’ announced Teresa, running to look over the edge on tiptoe.

‘So long as you give me the credit, I’ll let you off the chorus,’ said Mrs. Maxwell, magnanimously; ‘and I’ll own more, I’ll own that if it hadn’t been for Peppina I should never have stood out. She knows how to get round me,’ she added with a sigh.

‘Nina, on the contrary, hasn’t come willingly at all.’

‘She upset the oil just before starting yesterday,’ said Sylvia hurriedly, ‘and that’s *so* unlucky! Wasn’t it unfortunate?’

‘Very,’ Wilbraham said drily.

‘Look,’ interposed Teresa—‘look at that sheet of pink against the blue. That’s almond blossom. Oh, I must have some!’

When she went into her room at the Castello-a-mare before dinner, there

lay bunches of the beautiful blossoms. She gave a cry of delight, and fell to sticking them about in all imaginable places. Nina, who came after her, explained that Wilbraham had brought them himself.

‘Arms full,’ she said, spreading out her own with a gay laugh.

And Teresa was touched, thinking that it must have cost him something to turn himself into a maypole for her pleasure. He was improving. She decked Sylvia with several of the pink flowers before going in to dinner, for only a pleasant Hungarian doctor and his wife would be there besides themselves, and twisted some into her own dress. The sisters went in together. Wilbraham was standing alone at the end of the room.

‘Thank you for the almond blossom,’ Teresa called out cheerfully. ‘There you see the result.’

And she made a little movement of

her hand towards Sylvia, who stood like a charming woodland picture of Spring, all white and pink. But Wilbraham glanced coldly.

‘I sent them to you,’ he said with a touch of reproach in his tone which made Teresa open her eyes.

‘Brought them, I hear,’ she said teasingly. ‘It was heroic of you. How many “*Buon giorno’s*” and “*Porto io’s*” had you to face? I didn’t believe I could so quickly have got tired of the words. As we came along I heard mothers urging tiny shy babies of two or three—“*Vai, vai, di’ buon giorno, un soldo, signora!*” They are so pretty, too! And the creatures, pertinacious as they are, bear no malice when one is cross; just laugh and make way for another troop.’

‘Walter says that one ought not to give to beggars,’ Sylvia announced.

‘Ah! I shall, though, when a baby says “*Bon zorno!*”’

‘For pity’s sake don’t make me out a prig, Sylvia !’

He spoke almost roughly, and Teresa fired.

‘You should be flattered at her remembering your commands !’

‘Was I rude ? I beg your pardon,’ said Wilbraham quickly.

But had Mrs. Brodrick been in the room, she would have observed that he begged his pardon from Teresa.

If the first day carried with it a touch of uneasiness, those that followed swept by for some of them in a dream of enchantment.

The Castello-a-mare, where they were, stands a little out of the town, perched on the very top of the road which zigzags up from the station. And the view ! There, ever-changing in colour, its blue and opal and tenderest green melting through each other or growing into dazzling brightness, lies the most classical of seas ; far away

behind a fine sweep of coast is Syracuse, a nearer promontory marks the first settlement of Greeks in Calypso's lovely island ; to your right, sweeps up the great volcano, with heart of fire and crest of snow, and all the foreground is broken and steep, with growth of almonds, and fennel, and tree-spurge. Sometimes the outlook is radiant beyond words ; it is often so at sunrise, when Etna has flung off clouds, and his eternal snows flush rosy pink above the soft blue mists of the plain. Then everything is so light, so fresh, so sparkling, that it will make even a tired heart believe the old world and all its life is young again. But there are other times when storms rush madly forwards, and the sea grows grey, and the slopes of Etna are sullen purple, and wind and rain battle each other passionately on the heights of Taormina. You look with fear, and lo, the fierce southern rage is over, the clouds are

gone, and, faint and lovely at first, presently out laughs the ethereal blue again.

A sketching fever possessed Donna Teresa. The others, clambering up and down the dirty, narrow, stony lanes, would come upon her sitting alone and profoundly content before some arcaded window set in a wall, an orange-tree peeping from behind the dainty centre shaft, unbroken blue above. Or she might be found under Duca Stefano's tower, peaceful now after, so says tradition, its strange and wicked cruelties, where, for a few soldi, you may rest undisturbed in a wilderness garden, and look through palms at a luminous sea, or at queer corners of houses with deep eaves and wooden balconies, where bright rags flutter, vines clamber, and women lean for gossip. High behind is a sweep of arid hill, rough with prickly pear, and catching the shadow of every passing cloud and the glory of the sun as it sinks behind Etna.

And it was for these minutes that Wilbraham—as yet unconsciously—lived.

Then one day he came upon her in the Greek theatre.

Little of the Greek is left, except here and there a white pillar, or a slab built into the wall, for where marble had shone the Romans have set their brickwork. But who can quarrel with brick which takes such glory of colour and offers such crannies for tufted weeds, hanging in delicate masses of yellow, white, and green? Teresa had laid down her brushes, and with her chin resting on her hands was looking through a nobly-rounded arch at that view which is surely all but satisfying. White clouds wrapped Etna, but between them pierced an occasional whiteness which was not cloud, and, below, the purple slopes swept in great curves, taking strange greens and violets as they advanced. Only one building broke their

line, the Dominican monastery, and that, with the mysterious gloom of fading day upon it, and the ground falling precipitously in front, did no more than add a suggestive human interest to the grandeur it shared.

The spot always moved Teresa, but she liked to keep her emotions to herself; and as Wilbraham came towards her, she sprang to her feet, and began to gather two or three of the dwarf irises which starred the grass.

‘Are you going?’ he said in a disappointed tone. ‘Have you finished painting so soon?’

‘I refuse to caricature, and so I haven’t begun,’ she replied with a gay laugh. ‘What have you done with Sylvia?’

‘Gone to tea.’

‘Oh, tea!—she looked at her watch. ‘And what brought you here? Were you afraid I should be briganded between the Messina gate and the hotel?’

'Not in the least. I should as soon expect you to have an encounter with the shade of Dionysios.'

She began to stroll round the face of the grass slope which sweeps up to where the poorer people stood to see the plays.

'Nina would not agree with you,' she said suddenly; 'she throws out mysterious hints of bad characters in Sicily.'

'I daresay. If one went into the interior and out of the beaten track, for instance; but here, where strangers are their best harvest, they wouldn't be disposed to snipe them. Self-interest would go hand-in-hand with law and order, you see.'

'And that's the best you'll say?'

'Oh, well,' he allowed carelessly, 'I own they're wretchedly poor and I shouldn't like to live myself on a hunch of bread and a root of fennel. Won't you sit down?'

She turned to answer, hesitated, finally dropped on the grass. A lighter, tenderer view lay before them here. For now the sea filled the openings between the brickwork—the many coloured sea along which Ulysses rowed—and there was the line of coast above which Polyphemus herded his flocks, and flung Cyclopean rocks at his tormentors.

‘I can’t,’ she said unexpectedly.

‘Can’t what?’

‘Realise their misery with all this beauty around. It’s heartless, hateful, but one pushes out the other.’

‘Let it go,’ he said, watching her changing face.

‘It must,’ she smiled. ‘All the same I shall hush up my conscience in ways which will shock you. Look !’ She drew from her pocket a handful of soldi. ‘I mean the children to have a real good time, in spite of you and Sylvia.’

She tossed pennies into the air and caught them, without noticing that a sudden silence had fallen.

Wilbraham had gone on day after day refusing to look before him, refusing to go beyond the events of the day. He was often irritated or provoked by Sylvia ; but often, alas, he was happy, without asking himself why. Now, all of a sudden it flashed upon him that it was Teresa's nearness, and with the knowledge rushed a wild, scarcely controllable, impulse to strain her in his arms. The self-control of all his years luckily came to his help, and the young marchesa, looking out at the lovely world before her, and thinking of nothing less than her companion, except as he touched Sylvia's life, was quite unconscious of the struggle in the man's heart.

'We ought to go—I suppose,' she said reluctantly, without moving.

Wilbraham was silent. Unseen by

her, he was fingering a fold of her dress which lay on the grass close to him. Teresa laughed lightly the next minute.

‘It is a pity, isn’t it, that one never can enjoy an exquisite moment without thinking what has to be done in the next? At least I can’t.’

‘Why should one think?’ he said. His voice sounded so queerly in his own ears that he half hoped, half feared, she must detect something,

‘No; as I say, it’s a pity, it’s stupid. I suppose it’s the penalty one has to pay for the drive of life.’

‘Tell me——’ he began and suddenly stopped. She looked round, surprised.

‘Tell you what?’

‘No, I won’t say it.’

She thought he might be going to ask something about Sylvia, and wondered how she could help him.

‘As we are here,’ she said, ‘we may as well see the sunset.’

For already there was a throb of

pink in the clear western sky, pink, of which the almond blossom seemed the reflection. Teresa's face was turned from him to watch it grow, and for a long time neither spoke. It was a dangerous silence, had she but known it. At last she drew a deep breath.

'There must be a golden sea on the other side of Etna,' she said, 'and I wish I was there. Don't you ?'

'No. I'm content.'

She laughed, and sprang up.

'No? Well this ought to content one, certainly. But to punish you for not fretting after the unattainable, I am going back.'

He followed silently, and they said very little as they went down the uneven street, past the Palazzo Corvaij, where slender columns support Gothic arches, and bands of black lava contrast with yellow stone, past the vast dark holes in which the people live and die and have shops and make merry, and so

out of the little hillside town by the Messina gate. But just as they reached a great sumach-tree in a bend of the road, Teresa, who had been thinking, put an imprudent question—

‘Do you really never want the unattainable?’

Wilbraham’s hands were clenched, his face turned away.

‘Oh, my God !’ he cried, under his breath, ‘do I not !’

CHAPTER XIII

MRS. BRODRICK was sitting under an awning on the broad terrace when Mrs. Maxwell stepped out of the window. She was never very comfortable at having Mary Maxwell alone. It seemed to her that her shrewd eyes saw too many things. But she put down her book and welcomed her.

‘They haven’t bestowed much of a shade upon you,’ said Mrs. Maxwell, glancing up.

‘I don’t take much. Age shrinks.’

She moved her chair, smiling.

‘Don’t talk about age. It’s an unpleasant subject,’ Mrs. Maxwell complained, dropping into a chair. ‘And

as for you, you are younger than any of us. It's only people of the same standing who would call you old. Don't you know? Elderly people always talk about their contemporaries as "old Mr. Smith," "old Mr. Jones." It's their way of pretending to be still young.'

'Well, I won't pretend,' said Mrs. Brodrick. 'But I know the temptation so well, that I very often go away and read my Rabbi Ben Ezra. I was noticing to-day that my shadow looked old, and that's a great step.'

'Oh, granny, nonsense!'

'And, after all, it is always interesting to reach new experiences. For instance, I have just found out that one is less seldom disappointed, but sooner discouraged.'

She was keeping the talk upon herself only because she was afraid of its drifting elsewhere; but Mrs. Maxwell had a purpose.

‘Where is Sylvia?’ she asked suddenly.

‘Isn’t she picking irises in the garden behind me?’

‘I see. Where’s Teresa?’

‘Sketching.’

‘And Mr. Wilbraham?’

‘Really, I don’t know,’ said Mrs. Brodrick, with a touch of displeasure.
‘Probably with your husband.’

‘Oh, my husband! My husband is worshipping a silly forged Greek coin,’ said Mrs. Maxwell irrepressibly.

‘Each one seems to be having a solitary time of it.’

‘I wish you and Teresa were improving it by meditating on your im-prudences. No, really I must speak. I get frightened for poor Sylvia. Don’t you see? Those two *are* so unsuited!’

‘Really?’ Mrs. Brodrick drew herself up.

‘Oh, you know it!’ cried Mrs. Maxwell, in a transport of self-sacrifice.

‘I hate speaking so brutally, but one must do horrid things for those one cares for ; and I am sure, unless you interfere, there will be some awful dénouément. He isn’t thinking about Sylvia.’

‘Mary !’

‘He isn’t. He is awaking to a much bigger emotion ; and you know, as well as I do, that Sylvia, with all her prettiness, isn’t the girl to inspire a great passion. If it’s not Sylvia, who is it ?’

Mrs. Brodrick remained silent. Mary Maxwell came and knelt by her side, laying her head on her lap.

‘Granny, don’t be angry ! You know you’re frightened, and you know I care about you all. But you’re dreadfully high-minded. Isn’t there anything you can do ?’

Mrs. Brodrick suddenly collapsed.

‘Nothing,’ she said miserably. ‘How can any one move ? It rests between

him and Sylvia, and Sylvia, poor child, is absolutely — piteously content. She doesn't see.'

'And never will !' thought Mrs. Maxwell; 'Heaven help us, for there must be some way out of this tangle, if one could only find it !' She said aloud, hesitatingly, ' Could Teresa speak to her ?'

' Could she ?' Mrs. Brodrick turned a pallid face, and Mrs. Maxwell shook her head.

' True — impossible. Teresa must be kept out of it. Is there *any* hint that Sylvia would accept ? Granny, you might try.'

' As if I hadn't tried—twenty times !'

' And she won't take it ?'

' It isn't that she *won't*. She doesn't realise that there can be anything I want to say.'

Mary Maxwell already felt better for having extracted a confidence which proved her to be in the right.

' It's awful,' she said cheerfully. ' All

She turned to answer, hesitated, finally dropped on the grass. A lighter, tenderer view lay before them here. For now the sea filled the openings between the brickwork—the many coloured sea along which Ulysses rowed—and there was the line of coast above which Polyphemus herded his flocks, and flung Cyclopean rocks at his tormentors.

‘I can’t,’ she said unexpectedly.

‘Can’t what?’

‘Realise their misery with all this beauty around. It’s heartless, hateful, but one pushes out the other.’

‘Let it go,’ he said, watching her changing face.

‘It must,’ she smiled. ‘All the same I shall hush up my conscience in ways which will shock you. Look !’ She drew from her pocket a handful of soldi. ‘I mean the children to have a real good time, in spite of you and Sylvia.’

She tossed pennies into the air and caught them, without noticing that a sudden silence had fallen.

Wilbraham had gone on day after day refusing to look before him, refusing to go beyond the events of the day. He was often irritated or provoked by Sylvia ; but often, alas, he was happy, without asking himself why. Now, all of a sudden it flashed upon him that it was Teresa's nearness, and with the knowledge rushed a wild, scarcely controllable, impulse to strain her in his arms. The self-control of all his years luckily came to his help, and the young marchesa, looking out at the lovely world before her, and thinking of nothing less than her companion, except as he touched Sylvia's life, was quite unconscious of the struggle in the man's heart.

'We ought to go—I suppose,' she said reluctantly, without moving.

Wilbraham was silent. Unseen by

purple and white irises, stopped lazily to watch the lizards darting in and out of the sun-baked wall, and then gone in to write a letter. She had few correspondents, but there was an old nurse who thought all the world of her, and was made happy by a sheet of unformed, straggling writing, and bare bones of fact, always supported by a dictionary, and unimpeded by stops.

'It is very pleasant here' Sylvia wrote; 'there are so many flowers We make expeditions'—*sh* decided against by help of the dictionary—'and the weather is beautiful Granny and Teresa are quite well I am very happy' She had reached so far when Wilbraham came in. She flung down her pen and jumped up joyfully.

'Oh, Walter, where have you been ? I was wondering so !'

'Down by the shore.'

There was a set, hunted look on his face, as if he had not slept, which was

true. He had extracted the key of a side door from the chambermaid, and had wandered for hours through the mystical southern night.

'Oh, you promised to take me to the shore when you went.'

'Did I ?'

'Never mind. I will go next time,' said Sylvia happily. Whatever he did or did not do contented her. 'I have been very busy.'

'Yes ?'

'Yes ; picking flowers. They are all ready now for Teresa to put in when she comes. Have you seen her ?'

'No.'

'She does wander so far by herself ; I wonder she isn't afraid. Shall we go and look for her ? I have nearly finished, Walter. I have written all this to Dobbin. Look !' She held up the sprawly sheet for his admiration.
'Haven't I been good ?'

'You are always good,' he said re-

morsefully. And he glanced at her, thinking for the hundredth time how pretty she was, and wondering why everything she said should be so flatly ineffectual. But he had something to tell her, and he dashed at it hurriedly—

‘I’m afraid, I’m very much afraid, that I shall have to go back to England.’

‘To England !’ She looked at him incredulously.

‘Yes. I’m wanted there.’

‘But not yet. You’ve had no letters to-day.’

He cursed his want of premeditation. He had forgotten that every now and then Sylvia developed an odd practical shrewdness.

‘Not to-day.’

‘Not to-day, and only two from your mother since we’ve been here.’

‘I must go all the same,’ he said, taking refuge in obstinacy. ‘I’ve been pleasuring too long.’

Evidently and unusually she was puzzled.

'But,' she said slowly, at last, 'but—I don't understand. You can't go all in a minute. We have to see Syracuse and Palermo, and—a great many things. Indeed, Walter, you can't! It wouldn't be right. Why should you? I remember you told me you would not go home until you took me.'

'Things change.'

'What has changed?'

He looked at her, and thought bitterly how little she knew that she was pleading against herself—against his better self. The other half of him wanted to stay, swore it was folly to give up an hour of the only happiness which life still held, and all for a scruple. He was going to stick to Sylvia. That much stood firm amid the general earthquake.

'I'd better go,' he said doggedly.

'Oh, no,' returned Sylvia decidedly ; 'you mustn't.' After a momentary pause she added, 'It would be so odd !'

'Would it ?' He flung hasty thought at what the others would say on the matter, and his leaving immediately looked so suspicious in his own eyes, that he felt as if it must proclaim his secret to the world. He forced a laugh, however.

'What's odd in having business to see after ?'

'Oh, but they all know you haven't.'
Silence.

'I wish I knew what makes you want to go home,' said Sylvia wonderingly. 'I can't think ! Won't you tell me ?'

Wilbraham moved uneasily. He could not lie to her, and the truth was impossible. He chose a middle course.

'If you really dislike it so much, I'll

stay. It shall make no difference,' he promised his conscience.

'I was sure you would not go,' was all she said, and he was vaguely surprised, expecting delight and surprise in a gush, but thankful they were not lavished upon him.

Through that day and the next, and the next, he kept iron hands on himself, close to Sylvia's side. Teresa was too well pleased to see him there so much as to wonder why once or twice he avoided her—almost rudely. She went on her way light-heartedly, and began to sing when she was alone. She painted here, there, everywhere, the women carrying their empty pitchers to the fountain lengthways on their heads, or coming back upright, supple, with the heavy weight poised securely ; the old people hurrying with their chairs to a little homely church, sunk in a narrow street ; the Catania Gate, with its long flight of outer steps, and

its odd crooked arches ; walls blistered by sun, and overhung by grey-green prickly pear and red shoots of pomegranate ; Gothic arches, rose windows ; sunrise and sunset ; glory of noonday ; flash of falling rain, and sullen overshadowing of thunder-cloud. The little city, hanging on its hillside, had for her a charm which never wearied.

The only one who seemed restless and dissatisfied was Nina. Teresa began to be sorry that she had brought her, though she had imagined it would make travelling easier for her grandmother. But the little Viterbo woman frankly hated the place, and Italians of her class are too much like children to attempt to disguise their feelings. Then she had spilt oil on the day of their departure, and only the Madonna knew what disasters that might not bring ! There was a bottle of wine close by, and why should not that have been knocked over instead, when such an

upset would have ensured good luck ? For want of other listeners, she talked of this to Peppina, and watched the girl's face as she spoke. Peppina shrugged her shoulders.

'Eh, who knows ?' she answered carelessly. 'For that you have to take your chance with the rest.'

Peppina had learnt from Cesare to mock at omens which came to others, but she could not help being still terrified when she encountered them herself.

'That is news !' retorted Nina scornfully. 'If it was not for the chance it would be easy.'

'You or another. There are enough of you ! One, two, three, four, five,' the girl counted on her fingers. 'Five chances. Try the cards if you want to know which.'

'Who it comes from, rather,' said the other with significance.

Peppina darted a look from under

her long eyelashes, and her voice slightly shook.

‘Will they tell you that? I do not believe it.’

‘Will they? *Altro!* One as much as the other,’ said Nina, enjoying her uneasiness. ‘And I say an apoplexy upon whoever it is! An apoplexy!’

‘Be quiet!’ cried Peppina angrily, a spasm crossing her face, and her hand almost unconsciously signing against the evil eye; ‘be quiet with your jay’s voice, when my signora is trying to sleep above. Who talks of apoplexies?’

Nina was too well pleased with the effect she had produced to be affronted.

‘Is she ill then?’

‘Her head aches. It wants to be amused.’

Peppina was uncomfortably aware that she had said too much once more. She yawned intentionally, flinging her arms over her head. ‘Diamine, I could

sleep myself,' she added drowsily, but looking at Nina through half-closed lids.

'Well, sleep—sleep if you will. There is nothing to be done—not so much as a ricotta making in this nest of owls,' said Nina, waving Taormina away from her with disdain. 'You will wake in time to see Cesare.'

'Cesare!' Peppina started up as if struck with a whip. 'What do you say?'

'Did you not know he was here? Then I am wiser than you, for once. He should have been to see you before—a pretty girl like you! But there—those men!' Nina shook her head sympathetically. 'There is the Cianchetti, of course.'

'Hold your tongue! If he is here, he will come, beyond a doubt!' cried the girl, eyeing her furiously, and panting to acknowledge that she had passed an hour with her lover the evening

before. ‘The Cianchetti ! A creature like that !’

‘A creature, as you say, but then she is pretty. And that he should be here and not tell you !’

Nina held up her hands, perfectly aware of what was struggling in Peppina’s breast, and amused at her easy victory.

‘I tell you he will come !’ exclaimed the girl breathlessly.

‘We shall see.’

Nina nodded many times, and there was a short pause, in which Peppina’s fear grew stronger than her vanity.

‘How do you know he is here ?’

‘Eh-h-h-h-h ! One has eyes,’ answered Nina carelessly. ‘Why does he come ?’

‘Who knows ?’ said the girl, wary again.

‘What it is to have money for travelling !’ exclaimed Nina, who was sure that Peppina had somehow got

the money from Mrs. Maxwell. ‘It is wine he must have upset, not oil like me.’

‘Do you still think of it?’ said Peppina, anxious to turn the conversation.

‘I shall sort the cards to-night, and try to find out who the ill-luck comes from. Whoever it is, an apoplexy on him!’ cried Nina vengefully.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE had been a slight, a very slight change in Sylvia since the day when Wilbraham so abruptly announced that he was going to England. She was not quite so confident ; once or twice Mrs. Brodrick had fancied she was not confident at all. Teresa, blinded by art and sunshine, flung off her cares, and enjoyed herself to the full. Mrs. Maxwell, growing slightly bored, began to talk of going on to Syracuse. She said it was because Mrs. Brodrick looked pale.

‘I shall be so sorry to go myself. It’s a delightful place,’ she declared, yawning.

‘A rare good hole for Greek coins,’

said her husband, ‘and a lot more coming next week. I want to see them.’

She glanced at him pityingly.

‘Ten days more?’ pleaded Teresa. ‘Come, that will carry us over Easter and the processions. Think of a procession in the streets of Taormina !’

Mrs. Maxwell, who liked to see everything, reflected and agreed.

‘But I’m very uncomfortable here,’ she added. ‘I should wish you all to know that Peppina is really no good to me at all. See how she’s done my hair to-day. A perfect fright, in spite of the lessons I showered upon her.’

‘Our servants are not quite successful. Nina looks as she looked when she had toothache, and I can’t say more ! She is prejudiced against Sicily.’

‘They might consider us a little,’ said Mrs. Maxwell. ‘But your Nina does serve you faithfully. Now, Peppina would not care what happened

to me, so long as she clutched the lire. Why don't I part with her? Oh, she's so pleasant, I can't. She makes up for all Jem's shortcomings, and they're many. He always stumps about when I've a headache.'

'What's that?' asked Colonel Maxwell.

'Nothing. I only said if I were weighed against a Greek coin—forged, my dear, that's the sting of it,' she whispered to Teresa—'I shouldn't have a chance.'

But her eyes smiled kindly as she looked at her big husband, whom she teased and adored.

Teresa laughed, and went back to get her drawing things. Nina carried them for her, almost the only personal service which the marchesa accepted. She looked so miserable that Teresa began to question her—

'What is the matter, Nina? Have you, perhaps, toothache again?'

'It is an ache here, eccellenza,' said Nina, laying her hand dramatically on her heart. 'It is because there are bad people in the world.'

In spite of herself Donna Teresa laughed.

'At that rate I don't know when the ache will stop. Have you met with any specially bad people at Taormina ?'

'*Altro !*' Nina cried emphatically. 'It is an evil place. See here, eccellenza, do not permit the signorina's Englishman to walk at night. The nights are not wholesome.'

'Not wholesome ? You mean dangerous ? *Ma, che !* What absurdity !' She altered her tone a little. 'If you are so unhappy away from Rome, I will send you back.'

'What good will that do the Englishman ?' asked Nina gloomily. 'Send Peppina, that might be better, eccellenza.'

'Peppina !' Teresa laughed again.

She knew that the two disagreed, and thought that Nina was inclined to be hard on the girl. ‘And why?’

‘She is hot-headed, and the air here is not good for that illness.’

‘The air? It is perfect.’

‘Not at night, eccellenza. It has been known to carry a man off as quickly as if—’

‘As if?’

‘As if he had had a knife in his heart,’ Nina said slowly, in a low whisper, and glancing round. Two men were coming up behind, and she immediately raised her voice to a more cheerful key. ‘Is it to be the blessed Sta. Caterina to-day, eccellenza? Not that I believe she can have anything to say to such ignorant people as these, but it is more lucky to sit where a saint looks down upon you, since she might be obliged to do something for her own credit.’

She talked so persistently all the rest

of the way that it was evident she meant to say nothing more on the subject of unwholesome air. Teresa, who knew her prejudices, was quite undisturbed by her hints, and occupied in her drawing. She sat in a little angle of the long street, which the Arabs called El Kasr—so linking it with the Luxor of Egypt—facing the beautiful doorway of Sta. Caterina's Church. The colouring is exquisite, for the wood has been faded by sun and soft winds into a grey blue—the exact shade of St. Peter's dome—veined here and there by pink, while high above door and cornice stands a small graceful figure of the saint, leaning on her wheel, and shaded by delicate grasses.

Teresa's eagerness about whatever interest absorbed her was apt to leave other impressions in the lurch. She was very well content to believe that things were greatly improved between Sylvia and Wilbraham, and that there

was no need for her to waste uneasiness in that direction ; indeed, she had persuaded herself that her past uneasiness had been born of mere over-anxiety. All along she had ranked the girl's prettiness unduly high in its effect, but now she was sure that her after qualms were unnecessary. As for Nina's chatter, that she dismissed with all the Tuesdays and Fridays, hunchbacks and oil-spilling, which haunted the little Viterbo woman's days. She was, indeed, unusually gay at heart, probably from her out-of-door life in that delicious air, which was now gently sweeping off the almond petals on the hillside.

Mrs. Maxwell was very much disappointed by the processions in Holy Week. After waiting for days, as she said, to see them, she *had* expected something better than a few white-hooded men straggling before the baldacchino. Yet the Duomo, empty of interest as it is—except to those who

penetrate to the embroideries in the sacristy—lends itself picturesquely to effect, with its fine doorways and its red marble steps. And on Good Friday, as she, Sylvia, and Wilbraham waited in a little piazza just inside an inner gate, Teresa saw something which she will never forget.

A church stands on one side, facing Etna and the many-coloured sea. Here the procession began to gather, and out of the church and down the steps was borne an inexpressibly scarred and forbidding-looking dead Christ on his bier. Through the gate it was carried towards the Duomo, while down a steep and stony lane the Madonna, high uplifted, came to join her divine Son. So far, though interesting, there was nothing very striking or impressive in the scene, but when the procession crept out again from the shadow of the Duomo, and, making its way back, wound slowly along the whole length of Taormina, it

was different. The narrowness of the street, with its balconies and leaning figures, the white-draped, white-hooded men, the multitude of moving twinkling lights, the flashes here and there of colour, the priests in their vestments, the swaying baldacchino—smote home, overpowered sordid details. Teresa looked at it with wet eyes.

Wilbraham was standing mutely next her ; Sylvia, full of exclamations, beyond him. Suddenly Teresa became aware that one of the hooded figures had turned his head towards them. There was no more than a slit for the eyes, yet she knew without seeing that some gaze, fierce and menacing, burnt behind the hood. So sure was she, that she spoke impetuously to Wilbraham when the figure had passed—

‘Did you see ? Who was it ?’

‘Some fellow who means to know me again,’ he said after a momentary pause.

'No. It was some one who hated you,' she answered with a trembling voice. Nina's words, 'a knife in the heart,' came driving back, and moved her strangely.

His head whirled. In unconscious excitement she had pressed a little closely to him, her sleeve brushed his. He was forced to guard his voice, lest it should betray joy that his possible danger should have so moved her. Sylvia spoke twice and he did not hear.

'Thank you,' he said in a low voice.
'Thank you.'

Something of strained repression in his voice startled her. She looked at him in sudden dismay, and the revelation was so impossible, so astounding, that it for the instant left her dazed. She felt as if a cold hand had been laid upon her heart. The next moment the consciousness of Sylvia gave her back herself. Had she seen? Did she know? It was of Sylvia that she must

think, it was Sylvia whom she must protect, it was to her she spoke very gently—

‘I’m going back now, and you will come when you like.’ Amazement, not emotion, had shaken her, and, afraid lest he should think she was in any degree sharing his, she looked coolly in his face. ‘Don’t let Sylvia overtire herself,’ she said. ‘That would be much more serious than for a man to stare at us behind his hood.’

But, as she walked swiftly along the white road, fear and amazement at her discovery swept over her again. The odiousness of the situation appalled her. She raged against herself, beginning to realise her folly in trying to bolster up Wilbraham’s short-lived love. She had put Sylvia in the best positions, hidden the emptiness of the girl’s mind by her own quickness, been kind to Wilbraham for her sister’s sake until now, now—Mrs. Brodrick was startled by Teresa,

white-faced and shaken, appearing suddenly in her room.

‘Granny,’ she began breathlessly and flinging herself by her side, ‘things are going very badly indeed.’

And their eyes met, full of understanding.

‘It had to come,’ said Mrs. Brodrick with a sigh.

‘But not this. Nothing so wretched as this ! I don’t think I *can* tell you,’ she went on, flinging her head back and staring dismally at her grandmother. Mrs. Brodrick met her look without a vestige of the surprise she expected.

‘Poor Teresa !’ she said, laying her hand on hers. ‘Has he been making love to you instead of to Sylvia ? What has he done ?’

There was a certain relief in not having to explain the first miserable discovery, and she told her tale in short gasps which ended in a half-laugh of contempt.

‘Nina was so odd in her warnings,’ she explained, ‘that although I did not mind them at the time, when I saw that man glaring I was seized with terror. Something—of course it was a ridiculous fancy—made me think it was Cesare. And, granny,—I shall never forgive myself!—I was frightened, and I suppose he thought I cared for him. But how could he! How could he!’

‘It had to come,’ Mrs. Brodrick repeated, but a perplexed frown gathered on her forehead, for she was trying to think what would come next. ‘Put yourself out of your thoughts, dear,’ she added after a moment’s pause. ‘It does not much matter what has brought the climax. What matters a great deal is the effect upon—Sylvia. She—she does not see so quickly as some girls would.’

‘I know, and I know that I am to blame,’ said Donna Teresa very humbly. ‘I will do anything you think best.

Must she be told ?' she suggested hesitatingly. 'It takes so little to make her happy !'

'There are two to make happy,' answered her grandmother, smiling sadly.

The young marchesa flung up her head haughtily:

'He ! I do not think of him !'

'Then you do not really blame yourself, for it is he whom you have injured.'

'Oh,' cried Teresa with an angry light in her eyes, 'I shall never forgive him !'

Mrs. Brodrick took no notice.

'It always comes back to one fact,' she said presently. 'I suppose you or I will have to speak to poor Sylvia.'

Teresa sprang up, and began to walk about the room.

'What can we say ?' she asked, stopping. 'Not everything ?'

'No, certainly. You mustn't come

into it. We must tell her that—that we think there has been a mistake. That perhaps she should give him back his word—'

'Tell her she ought,' Teresa broke in drearily. 'Sylvia is so good, she will do anything she thinks she ought. Why is it the good people who always have to suffer? Little Sylvia! And I meant her to be so happy! Granny, be very, very kind to her. Must it be to-day?'

'No,' said Mrs. Brodrick, considering.
'Let us wait a day.'

'Till Monday.'

'Well—till Monday. Perhaps he will speak. Perhaps something will come to her. Do you think that man was really Cesare?'

'What do I care if it was?'

But in spite of her indifference her grandmother, without mentioning the incident, asked Mrs. Maxwell whether Peppina's lover was in Taormina.

'I wonder?' returned Mrs. Maxwell meditatively. 'She broke a scent bottle this morning—I believe he is.'

Peppina, however, asked casually where her lover now was, swore with so much detail that her Cesare, poor fellow, was in Rome, working on the *Avanti* staff; that her sister had seen him the day before and had heard from him how he had been obliged to have the doctor for Angelo, the poor cripple, and the doctor had said it was good broth the creature wanted—but how could Cesare, with his wages, get good broth?—that Mrs. Maxwell melted into conviction and five lire.

No one thought of asking Nina, and no one except she was aware that on that same night Peppina was leaning over a wall, under a golden moon, talking to a man whose movements were very like those of Cesare. She was pressing something into his hand.

'Diamine,' she was saying, 'and why

not, when I tell you I have more than I want ?'

'But how, how ? That is my question. You do not ask for it ?' he added suddenly, his anger rising.

'And if I did, what is that to you ?' she retorted, swinging away. 'But I do not. They raise my wages.'

'Again?' said Cesare, still suspicious.
'Per Bacco, and for what ?'

'For what ? For nothing. I tell you they fling their money, they have so much. To me, or to others, what does it matter ? And so long as you want it and do not waste it on—the Cianchetti, for instance——'

Her breath came shortly ; but Cesare, who had grown used to these hints, for which indeed Nina only was responsible, took no notice, and as her moods changed quickly and she was impressionable the soft stillness of the night calmed her.

'Cesare mio, what are you going to

do? Do not be rash. There is danger with these cold-blooded English,' she went on, speaking very tenderly.

'I am not afraid. There is no danger here. And if there were, I do not know that I care. Now or then, what does it matter? But I am not afraid. I have friends.'

She swayed towards him whispering a word in his ear, and the next moment his hand was on her lips, and roughly.

'Mother of Heaven,' he exclaimed, 'be quiet! I will not have you speak of that, do you hear? I will not!'

She pushed away his hand and laughed.

'You and the lizards. There is no other to be the wiser.'

He stood silent for some minutes, presently reverting to what she had said—

'They fling their money, do they? And on Monday I went to the Bianchis' house—you know the Bianchi?'

She nodded.

‘Livia is ill—the little white one who always suffers, always! But now she is worse. I tell you she has nothing. She lies on the floor and moans till your heart swells. They took her to the hospital, the one at Sant’ Onofrio——’

Peppina nodded again.

‘The Bambino Gesù, yes.’

‘And they shut the door in their faces. There was room, but no money. They are good women, I do not blame them. But no money. And these, these fling theirs here, there, where they will, while we die.’ He went on gloomily, ‘We shall change all that before we have done.’

‘Eh,’ said the girl happily, ‘and then you will be rich in your turn.’

She closed her eyes, lapping herself in delicious thoughts of how she would have a dress which should outshine the Cianchetti’s wildest attempts, and plenty of good things to eat without working for them. Cesare was clever. But he

must not be imprudent. And she did not mean to ask him what was in his mind. She could forgive him anything except love for the Cianchetti.

Perhaps Cesare had not heard her last words. His worn and eager eyes looked out over the almond-trees to where dark Etna lay stretched along the land. There were things he saw in the night of which he never spoke to Pep-pina; often a haunting girl's face changing from laughter into sudden terrible reproach. He did not regret his deed. He looked upon himself as a righteous executioner despising ordered law, and believing that he and others of his own way of thinking were bound to execute judgment where it was called for. But his belief did not shut out the face, and he had now a curious thought that any other eyes looking out of the darkness would be more bearable than hers, so long — so long as they were not a woman's.

CHAPTER XV

ONE day, two days, passed. Mrs. Brodrick and Teresa felt like conspirators watching for a sign. As they did not get one, the telling Sylvia on the appointed day grew more disquieting in prospect. Evidently she was not quick enough to read faces, or she must have discovered for herself that something was wrong, that Wilbraham was gloomy, Teresa angry, and her grandmother uneasy. On Tuesday they were to go to Syracuse.

‘And we shall see him depart in another direction,’ said Teresa with decision.

‘If,’ said her grandmother—‘if all

this had never happened, do you believe you might some day have liked him ?'

The question had been on her lips more than once. The young marchesa hesitated.

'Perhaps,' she answered frankly.
'Perhaps—I don't know. I liked him better at Assisi.'

'He has been a fool,' thought Mrs. Brodrick, turning away.

At this moment Sylvia came hurriedly into the room.

'Is Mary here ?' she asked.
'No ; she is watching Peppina pack.
Where are you going ?'

Teresa with a heavy heart tried to speak playfully, and failed.

'Past the cemetery, and down towards the sea.'

'Ah, I never get you to myself nowadays.'

'But you know I love you, don't you, Teresa ?' said the girl anxiously.

'My dear !' cried the marchesa, still with a poor pretence at gaiety. She looked at her grandmother.

'Must you go ? Or can you first come to my room for half an hour ?' asked Mrs. Brodrick in a voice a little tremulous, and with lines showing suddenly in her face.

'Oh, I can't, granny, I can't now,' Sylvia returned ; 'Walter is waiting for me. When I come back I shall have plenty of time. Oh, please !'

'Well, go then,' said Mrs. Brodrick with a sigh.

Sylvia went down the long room, putting one or two things in tidy order as she passed. Wilbraham was waiting for her in the little look-out place behind the hotel. The ground, dotted with great prickly-pear clumps, fell very steeply towards the water, and folds of blue hills stretched from Monte Venere towards Messina. Across a radiant sea, snow gleamed on Aspromonte. Two

fishermen were coming up a narrow pathway.

‘Where are we going? By the cemetery?’ asked Sylvia.

Wilbraham roused himself with a start.

‘That’s as good a way as any—and the end of all things,’ he muttered under his breath, so that she did not hear. ‘But if she had heard,’ he reflected bitterly, ‘she would not have understood.’ He scarcely now took the trouble to conceal things from her, always feeling secure that she would not understand.

They went away together down stony tracks. The gate of the little burying-place was open; they could see its great bushes of scarlet geranium, and yellow daisies, and ugly staring tombs lying in sunshine. Sylvia wondered a great deal, as usual, whether people lived a long time at Taormina, whether there was a doctor, whether the children went to school. To all, Wilbraham

answered impatiently that he did not know.

Every now and then, however, she was silent, which was unusual, but struck him as a relief.

They skirted the wall, fennel towering high on the other side, and turned into a small steep path running down through flowery banks and fields, sheeted with red and blue vetches.

‘How funny it is to have fields like these !’

Sylvia’s remarks were above all things wanting in suggestiveness. Answers did not spring from them, but had to begin an altogether separate existence.

‘Are you tired ?’ asked Wilbraham, ‘or shall we go down to the shore ? I think you wanted to see the caves ?’

‘I wanted so much to see a flying-fish. I think it must look so odd, don’t you ? But then, of course, if we went, we might not see one. Shall we sit on this bank ?’

‘If you like.’

‘And talk?’

‘That too—if you like.’

‘I wanted to say something.’

He bit his lip, used to Sylvia’s utterances.

‘Well, my dear child, I’m listening.’

He was not thinking of her. His mind had shot away to Teresa, Teresa with an angry light in her eyes, for which he loved her the more. Hopeless, he would not have had her different; but different—to him—what might she not have been! Suddenly, unexpectedly, a word of Sylvia’s caught his attention.

‘I don’t think that people ought to marry unless they love each other. Every one always says they ought not,’ she was remarking in a nervously excited voice.

‘I think we had better give it up.’

‘Give it up? Do you mean break off our engagement?’ he faltered.

‘Sylvia!’

She was twisting a few blades of

grass into a plait, and looking down at that. But his words evidently distressed her.

'Oh, don't you think we had better?' she exclaimed, with the appeal of a child.

He had been conscious of so exquisite a relief that his honour took alarm.

'Why?' he said, leaning forward.
'What is your reason?'

She looked up at him, evidently troubled; the prettiness of her face pathetically touched with the quite new struggle to explain a feeling.

'Don't you know what I mean? I can't say it exactly, Walter. I thought you would be sure to understand. Don't you know? People must be *very* fond of each other, mustn't they?'

All the better part of him was quickened by a perception of her sweetness and humility. But the devil set him answering with conscious untruth, and almost roughness—

'So, Sylvia, you've never cared for me!'

Her distress shamed him.

'I did, I did, you know I did, Walter! Of course I did. And I have been so happy! Oh, please, don't say you don't think so. What can I say, what can I do, to make you know? *Do* know, *do* understand.'

All her body was working with quick excited movements, all her heart was in her eyes. Wilbraham covered his own.

'God forgive me, you poor little girl!' he groaned brokenly.

'Ah! then you do know,' she said in a voice that was almost pleased. A little pride in her rose up, because she had been able to convince him, for generally she never attempted to argue, accepting dutifully whatever view of the situation he or Teresa took. This time it was she herself who had made the impression. She put her hand into his.

'Oh, don't be sorry,' she said consolingly.

'But if you—if you love me?'

'Still, we've both got to do it, haven't we?' she said, and looked at him doubtfully. Was she perhaps mistaken after all? Walter had believed her when she reassured him, and so—if he were to say the same to her, well, then certainly she must believe him, too. And how glad she would be! How very very glad! She looked at him again. He was sorry, not pleased.

'Walter?' She hesitated.

'Yes, Sylvia?'

'Will you tell me?'

'What?'

'If I am right. I want to do what's right, but it's so funny, it doesn't seem to be quite easy. I thought one always knew.'

She sighed — an odd disjointed little sigh, and any sigh was so unlike Sylvia, that Wilbraham cursed himself

again. But what a question she was putting.

'How can I help you? Ask your own heart.'

Always literal, she tried to obey him, but in a few minutes turned a puzzled face.

'I don't think I know how to do it. My heart doesn't say anything different—at least, I don't say anything, if that's the same thing? It is, isn't it? It's you that must tell me.'

'I'll make you happy. I swear I will!'

And he meant it.

'Yes,' said the girl, speaking more slowly than was usual with her. 'Oh, I should be happy, of course.'

'Well, then?'

'But that isn't it, is it? It isn't my being happy—I wish you could help me,' she added, twisting her fingers nervously, and frowning—'I wish you could tell me.'

He started up, then flung himself down by her side, burying his face.

‘For God’s sake, Sylvia, what do you want me to say?’

‘Why, what you would like, of course,’ she returned simply. ‘We ought both of us to love each other, oughtn’t we?’

He made a slight movement of his head.

‘One—isn’t enough?’

Silence. But Sylvia must always have an answer.

‘Is it, Walter?’

He twisted himself.

‘Oh, I don’t know.’

‘Why, you know everything,’ she said proudly. ‘Of course you know. And please tell me, because I get so puzzled when I have to settle things for myself——’

Suddenly he caught her hands.

‘You told no one what you were going to say to me?’

‘There was no one I could quite ask,’ she replied drearily. ‘I thought granny would be too old.’

Teresa’s name she did not mention. Why not? he wondered guiltily.

‘And so it is you who must tell me. Have you forgotten what it is?’

‘No, I haven’t forgotten,’ he stammered, hot with shame. ‘If I don’t love you as much as I should, Sylvia, I —I think we should get along all right. I’d do my best.’

‘Oh! of course you would.’ She looked away. ‘I suppose people can’t always help making those mistakes, can they? How funny it is they should!’

She sighed, trying to smile.

‘And there is something else to ask you.’

He felt as if another of these problems would drive him mad.

‘What shall I call you now?’ said Sylvia, staring at him. ‘I suppose I

mustn't say Walter, and Mr. Wilbraham sounds so odd !'

The pathos and the pettiness of it ! The little mind casting about for props, and following so faithfully where those she had guided her !

'Sylvia,' he blurted out, 'I've been a brute—try me once more, dear. I'll do better, I swear it.'

She shook her head, smiling sadly.

'You see, I'm not clever like Teresa ; but I am quite sure no two people ought to marry unless they love each other very much. I thought you meant you did, and so I don't suppose I asked you questions enough. Then we might have found out, of course ; but I didn't. We needn't say any more about it, need we ?'

'I'll rid you of my company to-morrow.'

'Won't you come to Syracuse ? Oh, but you wanted to see something there, didn't you ? It seems such a pity you

should not see it ! If you come, I shan't tease you, indeed. Granny will be very glad to have me to walk with her. And if once or twice I do forget and call you Walter, I hope you won't mind much ?'

'My God, Sylvia,' he cried, 'you punish me !'

'Punish you ! Oh !' she exclaimed in distress—'but haven't I explained rightly ? I thought we should all be just as we were before Assisi. You used to walk about with us then, don't you know, and I don't see why this should make any difference.' She stood up. 'Shall we go back, or did you want to go on farther ?'

Go on ! He had a revulsion of feeling which swept remorse into the background. If she could say all this—if there was no more than a bare surface an inch deep to be stirred, he need not scourge himself with having troubled it for a few weeks. She could

suggest his remaining with them, could bear to see him day by day, could ask at this moment whether he would not like to walk farther ! This was not love. To lose this could cost nothing. She was a little pale—that was all.

‘I think we had better go back,’ he said in a cold voice.

As they clambered up the steep flowery path—Sylvia in her pretty pale green frock, chosen carefully by Teresa, looking the very creature to be moving through this flower-laden earth—he was already feeling a breezy exultation, a sense of freedom, which sent the blood coursing joyfully. And gradually, as this possessed him, other possibilities rushed into his vision. Surely Teresa would see for herself, would understand, that he was not so much to blame ? She, if any one, must be aware of Sylvia’s shallowness, must recognise that a man could not be content to pass through life with no other companion, would

excuse, forgive—ah, if he could but make her love him, how much would not she forgive?

And poor Sylvia—already forgotten, because she had not the power of impressing her little individuality—stumbled in front, while he walked on air behind. She was so unhappy that now and then she could not see the path for tears which blurred her eyes ; but her only fear was lest Wilbraham might find them out and blame himself. There was something heroic—or, if you will, true womanly—about the simple, unaffected manner in which she had done what she had determined ought to be done. She threw no thought at her own wrongs ; cast no reproach at Wilbraham ; did not look forward or shudder at the picture of dull grey days, such as have been known to drive women to despair ; did not exaggerate her sorrows.

And so, perhaps, even in hearing her

story, there are few who will pity her.

They had met no one, and had only noticed a few peasants working in the fields ; yet, as they again passed the cemetery gate, a man was walking not far behind. A labourer, gnawing a root of fennel, paused as he saw him, and made a movement of his head.

‘That way,’ he said significantly.

‘I know,’ returned the man, without quickening his steps.

CHAPTER XVI

TERESA was in her room—the room the sisters shared—when Sylvia came in. The girl's steps dragged with a suggestion of weariness, but she was smiling, and gave Teresa no impression of anything serious or sad having touched her life.

‘Where is Nina?’ she asked.

‘Nina is going about singing mournfully—

Venerdì e dì di Marte
Non si sposa, e non si parte.

We shall break Nina's heart with all the bad luck we set to work to bring down on our devoted heads. Tomorrow is Tuesday, and we travel.’

‘Must we?’ said Sylvia uneasily.

‘Oh, baby!’ She kissed her.

‘Well, I’m glad you’re at home. I believe there’s a thunderstorm on the way. Look at Etna.’

Clouds—dark, splendid clouds—were rolling up behind the great mountain. The light seemed suddenly to die out of the room.

‘I hope it won’t come in the night,’ said the girl. ‘Do you think it will? Of course, you don’t know; but I do think one sees it more in the dark.’

Teresa’s thoughts were not with the storm. They tenderly wrapped Sylvia, wondering how deep the pain would go.

‘Darling, didn’t granny say she wanted you? Perhaps you’d better go to her; and then, then, mind you come back to me. To me,’ she repeated tenderly.

‘There’ll be time before dinner,’ Sylvia objected without moving.

‘She’s waiting, dear.’

‘I’d rather talk to you, Teresa, please. There’s something I want to say. And it’s all so funny !’ she went on, breaking into a nervous laugh.

The laugh reassured Teresa. The first words had sent the blood back to her heart.

‘I’m listening,’ she said gaily. ‘I hope it’s very, very funny.’

‘Well, it is. At least I suppose most people would think so. Oh yes, it’s funny, of course. Teresa, you will marry him, won’t you ?’

The marchesa turned a whitely-amazed face to her sister.

‘I ? Marry ! Who—what ?’

‘Walter. Oh, I shall be able to call him Walter then, of course,’ said Sylvia, laughing again and nodding. And suddenly the laugh frightened Teresa. She laid her two hands on the girl’s shoulders and looked into her eyes.

‘Don’t laugh, please, dear,’ she said gravely ; ‘but tell me what you have in

your mind. Has Walter said anything to you ?'

'I told him,' Sylvia answered proudly.

'What ?'

'That we ought not to marry unless we both loved each other. You know, Teresa, that is quite right ; and you know, too, that he isn't fond of me any more, so, of course, we couldn't. He thought we could. He thought perhaps it would do if I was happy ; but I was sure I ought to say no. And so —she drew a long breath—'I said it.'

'Ah, my poor dear !' cried Teresa, pulling down the pretty head upon her shoulder, and kissing her again. For the moment she had forgotten Sylvia's first question, and it was the girl herself who reminded her.

'So now you will marry him, won't you ?'

Teresa had to keep check on herself, for she saw that Sylvia was in a state of tremulous excitement, and that she must

speak very quietly, though inwardly fuming.

‘What has put such a thing into your head—such an amazing thing? What could make you imagine that, under any possibility, I could marry Walter Wilbraham?’

‘Because he likes *you*,’ said Sylvia simply.

‘Likes me? Likes everybody, I suppose!’—scornfully.

‘Not me. If he did, of course we should be married. Now it will be much better that he should marry you.’

Teresa felt sick with the difficulty of convincing, and the remembrance of Wilbraham’s look. Sylvia’s ideas came but rarely, but once come it was next to impossible to dislodge them. She lifted the girl’s chin, and looked steadily into her eyes while she spoke.

‘Listen, dear,’ she said slowly. ‘I want you to understand very clearly. You have made a great mistake. He is

nothing to me, nothing, nothing—he never can be anything.'

'He likes you,' repeated Sylvia obstinately.

'Don't say such horrid things!' Teresa cried more hotly.

'And I should like him to have what he wants. I shall be so sorry if he goes away to-morrow.'

'Of course he must go.'

'Why?'

'Sylvia, I could shake you! Because if he is to be nothing to you, nobody else wants him.'

Sylvia stood staring out at the gathering clouds.

'Oh, but I want him,' she said at last.

'Dear! Why? How can you?'

'Of course I want him to be happy. When you are fond of any one——'

Teresa stared at her. What could she say? She saw that the girl was over-strained—nervous; but this firm

grasp of the one point she had seized was not to be loosened.

‘Ah, her love was worth something !’ thought her sister, turning away with a sigh. She perceived that she must temporise.

‘Dear, Mr. Wilbraham—Walter—will do what he himself thinks best ; we can’t possibly decide for him——’

‘Please, ask him to stay,’ Sylvia interrupted without heeding.

‘Ah, that I can’t do.’

The girl twisted her fingers.

‘Then I must,’ she said. ‘I’m afraid I shan’t persuade him, because, of course, I never can—but I must try. It’s all so funny, isn’t it ?’

‘It’s horribly sad,’ said Teresa to herself, ‘but certainly there will be no fear of the man staying. If it had been earlier in the day, he might have packed himself off at once. As it is, for a few hours, one must make the best of him and of it, and be thankful’—she sighed

—‘that it has ended. I never wish to see him again. Oh, Sylvia, my little Sylvia ! And I daresay he is persuading himself she doesn’t feel.’

‘I think I shall go and talk to Nina,’ said the girl. Her eyes looked bright, and a feverish spot burned in each cheek.

‘Dear—stay here.’

‘Must I ?’ The old wistful dependence upon Teresa had come back. ‘I think it’s going to thunder, and that always frightens me. Nina says things which are nice.’

‘Lie down on your bed. I’ll hang up something over the window ; Nina shall come and sit with you, and you’ll find yourself asleep before you know where you are. I’ll come back before dinner.’

‘Nina is going to make me some *latte di gallina* to-night,’ said Sylvia, unresisting.

Teresa made her lie down, covered,

coaxed, kissed her, then shrouded the window, guiltless of shutters. Nothing could be seen of Etna behind heavy menacing clouds which swept stormily up, and drifted sullenly along the purple slopes. The sea was lashing its white wild waves, which raced and plunged and flung themselves each on the other. Sylvia chattered about a hundred trifles —what Mary Maxwell had heard from England ; whether her hat could not go in with Teresa's ; whether they had really better start on a Tuesday. If Teresa succeeded in stopping her, she quickly began again. Her sister decided at last that Nina might manage better, and was going to seek her. But when she reached the door, there was a sharp sudden terrified cry from Sylvia.

‘Teresa ! Don’t go ! Don’t leave me here by myself !’

She had started up. Her sister instantly went back.

‘I won’t, dear, I won’t. I was only

going to find Nina, because there isn't the ghost of a bell in the house.'

'Yes, I should like Nina,' said the girl, settling down again. Teresa called from the door, and the little woman hurried in with her long 'Eh-h-h-h-h !' at sight of the darkened room.

'It is the storm,' Teresa explained.

'Eh, the storm ? It will not come yet,' said Nina, with the almost unerring certainty by which an Italian peasant foretells the weather. 'The signorina may sleep, and I will be here, but the storm not yet. *Ecco !*'

Sylvia seemed content. Teresa flew to her grandmother's room, longing to give vent to her pent-up indignation. She felt herself in the most hateful position in the world, and, woman-like, flung the whole weight of blame on Wilbraham. But Mrs. Brodrick, whose eyes had long been open, was juster.

'It was time it ended,' she said. 'It

has been a dreary mistake from first to last, and every day would have made it worse.'

'I suppose so. And yet, and yet—'

'Yes ?'

'If you had heard ! Not one of us could have taken it so well. I don't think she once remembered that it was hard on herself. Oh, I shall never forgive him !'

'Ah !'

'He had no right, no right !' cried Teresa hotly.

'Ah !'

'I—who have only tried to look at him with Sylvia's eyes, for Sylvia's sake !'

'There you have it,' said Mrs. Brodrick, with a smile. 'The poor man was bewildered between two sets of eyes. I'm much more charitable, and so I'm not surprised.'

'You're very nearly as bad as he !' cried Teresa indignantly. 'And, oh,

what shall we do to stop Mary Maxwell's remarks !'

'Let her make them, I suppose ; they will finish the sooner.'

'There will be a great many to endure before they finish.'

'Life is made up of such endurances,' said her grandmother patiently. 'She can talk to me. I am old and dull ; but a figure-head will serve at a stretch for a listener, and always has the advantage of not answering back again.'

'And after all,' said Teresa hopefully, 'her being with us is more cheerful for Sylvia. I think, poor dear, we shall be able to make her happy again in a little while—when he is well out of the way, as he will be soon.'

Mrs. Brodrick took up her knitting.

'Shall you speak to him ?' she asked carelessly.

'If he wishes it. Certainly.'

Teresa had thrown her head back like a spirited horse as she spoke, and at

the same moment a knock came at the door. The English gentleman would be obliged if her excellency would give him a few words on the terrace.

‘Her excellency will,’ she returned, flinging a defiant look at her grandmother, and resenting a shadow of doubt in her manner. She went out of the room quickly and silently, and Wilbraham, who was watching the windows from the end of the terrace, threw away his cigar and came to meet her. She saw that he was very pale, and her own manner was hard as she stood waiting for him to speak.

‘I feel that I owe you an explanation,’ he began.

‘I thought, on the contrary, that you might be asking for one from us,’ said Teresa at once coldly. ‘Sylvia has broken her engagement, she tells me.’

He hesitated, and turned away his look.

‘I should have tried to make her happy,’ he said, weighing his words.

‘You have failed, however, so far.’

‘It seems so.’ He had hesitated again.

‘It is a pity,’ went on Teresa relentlessly, ‘that you had not discovered the extent of your powers before attempting to apply them. You might have been saved this——’

‘Humiliation?’

‘Humiliation.’

She stood upright, a slim dark figure, her eyes judging him gravely and coldly. Behind her were the thunder-clouds of Etna.

‘If humiliation were all, it would be nothing,’ he said, his breath coming shortly. Perhaps he hoped she would have questioned him further. But her thoughts were with Sylvia.

‘No,’ she said, ‘nothing.’

‘Of course’—the words shot out from him in spite of himself—‘you only see one side. I suppose I can’t induce you to judge fairly?’

'I cannot see that my opinion is concerned. The affair is my sister's. She has decided for herself. Absolutely independently,' she added, with the desire to drive home Sylvia's capability.

'But you approve ?'

'I think she has acted for her own happiness,' said Teresa guardedly.

He looked gloomily at her.

'Some day you may be kinder to me.'

'Do you think so ?' Her tone was not pleasant. 'You will leave us tomorrow, of course, and it is unlikely that we shall often meet again.'

He walked away a few steps and returned.

'I tell you we will !' he said in a sharp passionate voice, which stung Teresa's anger like a lash. She flung back her head and cried.

'I never wish to see you again.'

'That may be.' His words breathed thickly. 'But I will see you.'

A sudden dread of a scene swept over her, and forced self-control.

'Whether we meet or not is of no possible consequence,' she said coolly. 'I do not think it would be pleasant, and I hope you will have left Rome when we return. Meanwhile you and Sylvia must get through this evening as best you can. You have misunderstood her hitherto, and I suppose you will misunderstand her to the end.'

She nodded and left him, not without thankfulness that he did not follow. It had been a sharp interview, charged with dangerous feeling, which enraged her against him. The *table d'hôte* hour was near, and she went to her own room, hoping to find Sylvia sleeping. As she opened the door, however, she heard her chatter.

'Oh, Sylvia,' she said reproachfully — 'when I wanted you to rest ! And you haven't even the excuse of a thunderstorm,' she added, pulling down

her defence from the window, 'for it has not come.'

'But it is coming, eccellenza,' said Nina, joining her and speaking in a low voice. 'It is coming in less than three hours. And there will be enough of it. It will keep people in the house to-night, that is one good thing.'

'Why?' laughed Teresa.

Nina's face expressed blank unconsciousness.

'Why? Who knows! We have a saying in my country, eccellenza, that where the eye does not see, mischief will not reach. A foolish saying, eh-h-h-h-h! But there are foolish ones everywhere, even at Viterbo.'

'Get up and dress, Sylvia,' said her sister cheerfully. 'And put on your prettiest frock.'

But Sylvia for once was determined to wear nothing but a black which she generally hated.

‘What does it matter?’ reflected Teresa. And yet she was wrong.

Two or three Austrians had arrived that afternoon, so that there was a larger company than usual at the table, where great bunches of white and purple irises were stuck at intervals. The Maxwells came in late and tired, having climbed to the castle at the back of Taormina. Teresa was glad that Mary was thinking more of her fatigue and her dinner than of Sylvia’s affairs, and that the talk contrived to be general. It grew early dark, for the sky was by this time heavy with cloud, and thunder was muttering. The little Hungarian doctor and his wife were smoking cigarettes. Maxwell and Wilbraham had got hold of an English newspaper; Maxwell was confounding his own luck in not having his juniors’ chances over some of the little wars which England was waging, and Wilbraham answering at long intervals. Teresa took Mary

Maxwell in hand, and goaded herself into sympathy over an account of her woes with her mother-in-law, hoping to leave Sylvia to talk or not as she liked. She found her work hard, for Mrs. Maxwell was far too shrewd to put up with a perfunctory attention, and Teresa's own mind was running through many sensations. She could not be sure how much Sylvia felt, how it would affect her ; whether the kind of light chatter, into which she heard her break, acted as a relief or carried danger. She was sure that Wilbraham would construe it into the indifference of a trivial nature, and was torn between her desire that he should hold Sylvia less lightly and satisfaction that he could not believe himself mourned. The idea that it was she, she, whom ironical fate had chosen to interpose between Sylvia's image and Wilbraham's heart, made her coldly, cruelly contemptuous. That he should dream—— !

'I shall go to bed,' yawned Mrs. Maxwell, 'though I don't believe I shall be able to sleep a wink. Shall I take Jem away? He is such a blind old goose, he never sees that he is monopolising our lovers. But Sylvia is in high spirits to-night.'

'Oh, don't disturb anybody,' implored Teresa. 'The thunder is getting nearer, and I shall have to sweep away Sylvia in ten seconds; she hates it so! I'll come up for a minute afterwards if I may speak to you.'

'Haven't we been speaking?' laughed Mrs. Maxwell, opening her eyes. 'But come, come, by all means.'

Her movement brought about others. Her husband went after her to fetch some newly-acquired treasure, which he wanted to show to the Hungarians; Wilbraham stood up, flung a hesitating glance on the group near the table, and stepped out on the terrace. Sylvia instantly and unexpectedly followed him.

Teresa half rose, but Mrs. Brodrick pulled her back.

‘Leave her,’ she said. ‘It is her right. What a flash ! What——’

They stared at each other. Before the almost instantaneous answer of the thunder rolled out, a sharp short report anticipated it. The Hungarian doctor sprang up and dashed through the window, Teresa only a step behind him.

‘My God ! Who is shot ?’ she heard him cry.

CHAPTER XVII

DAZZLED by the lightning glare, for a few instants Teresa could distinguish nothing but a heap of blackness. Then she saw Wilbraham kneeling on the ground with Sylvia in his arms.

‘Hold her—she’s hurt !’ he cried hoarsely.

As the doctor and Teresa raised her, he sprung to his feet and dashed into the gaping darkness.

Teresa never could remember how the next few minutes passed. The shot must have startled others, for Nina, the padrone, Colonel Maxwell, all came running. Mrs. Brodrick, too, was there.

‘Take her through the window to her room,’ she said quietly.

‘Come on then,’ said Colonel Maxwell, trying to speak cheerfully; ‘somebody open the window on the other side, and we shall soon see what’s wrong. Tell them, for Heaven’s sake, not to make such a confounded row,’ he added to the Hungarian, who knew a little English.

Teresa was voiceless, though all that was to be done she did with absolute precision. She helped to raise her, helped to lay her on the bed, sent the others away, and stayed alone with the doctor and her dead.

For Sylvia was dead.

The shot, which might have missed Wilbraham, had struck her full in the heart. Probably, in her black dress, undistinguishable in the darkness, she had been altogether unseen. There had not been time for a cry, a quiver. The life had gone out of her before she dropped.

The little Hungarian doctor, his rosy face strangely moved, raised himself, and looked pitifully at Teresa, who held the candle. She stopped his faltering words, putting up her hand.

‘I know,’ she said. ‘I knew it from the first.’

He wanted very much to comfort her.

‘There could have been no pain, no consciousness——’

‘Oh yes, there was pain enough—as much as she could bear !’ Teresa cried, the words wrung from her by the torture of an almost unbearable anguish. ‘If only she had died yesterday !’

The doctor looked at her, and realised that here was something he could not understand, and had better not question.

‘You are overdone, Donna Teresa, and no wonder, after such a terrible shock,’ he said quietly. ‘And there is also your grandmother to be considered. Will you go to her room, and take what

I will send you? I will inform the others, and see to the necessary details. Indeed, you should not remain here.'

His mind ran professionally forward to all that had to be done: the police, the strangers who would have to come and see for themselves. For this was no quiet death-bed where the mourners might sit silent in the hush of sorrow. Already there was a clamour of weeping outside the door—Peppina's the loudest—and Teresa's strange words made him afraid for her brain, so that he pressed her again.

'Send in your own woman. She has got her wits about her. Afterwards, I give you my word, you shall come back.'

Teresa waved him aside with a quiet gesture full of strength.

'I shall not leave her,' she said, 'and you need have no fears for me. There must be a great deal for you to do. Please see to it, and let Colonel Max-

well help you. Will you go to my grandmother first, and ask her to come to me in ten minutes? She and Nina —no one else.'

So she had ten minutes alone with her dead—ten minutes in which to stand and gaze at the fair young face, unmarred by the withering finger of illness, still round, still soft, still smiling, yet suddenly invested with that great dignity which Death alone can give to those he calls. Never before had Sylvia looked inscrutable, mysterious, far away, far above them all. Teresa touched her, kissed her, strained her in her arms. She was not yet cold; her young limbs were still supple. Teresa could have believed life was lingering but for that look—the look of something more than life, something into which life had suddenly sprung, something which came back across a gulf. In one little moment, Sylvia, ignorant Sylvia, had solved the great problem, and smiled at

them from beyond an immeasurable vastness. Teresa stretched out her arms—speechless—and grasped air.

A sound disturbed her, and she looked round. There stood Wilbraham, haggard, breathless, drenched to the skin, changed almost out of recognition. At the door Nina had tried to stop him, but he pushed her aside. The two eyed each other.

‘Too—late?’

Teresa only just caught the whisper.

‘It was momentary.’ Her quiet amazed herself.

His eyes persistently held away from Sylvia. He raised his hand to his wet hair, fingering it impatiently.

‘I did not catch him.’

‘Him? Who?’

‘The fellow who shot her—who shot at me.’

‘Who?’ Teresa frowned, trying to remember. In the rush of the tragedy, she had forgotten that some one was

responsible for it. ‘Oh,’ she cried desperately, ‘what of that !’

She turned away again. Against his will, Wilbraham’s blood-shot eyes followed hers to where Sylvia lay, serenely lifted above his level.

‘God forgive me !’ he groaned.

And before that supreme look of her dead, Teresa’s anger dropped into pity, and the saving tears rushed to her eyes.

‘And she, too !—She does, she does !’ she cried brokenly, stretching out her hands.

He seized them.

‘And you ?’

‘And I.’

He had his forgiveness. He would never have more.

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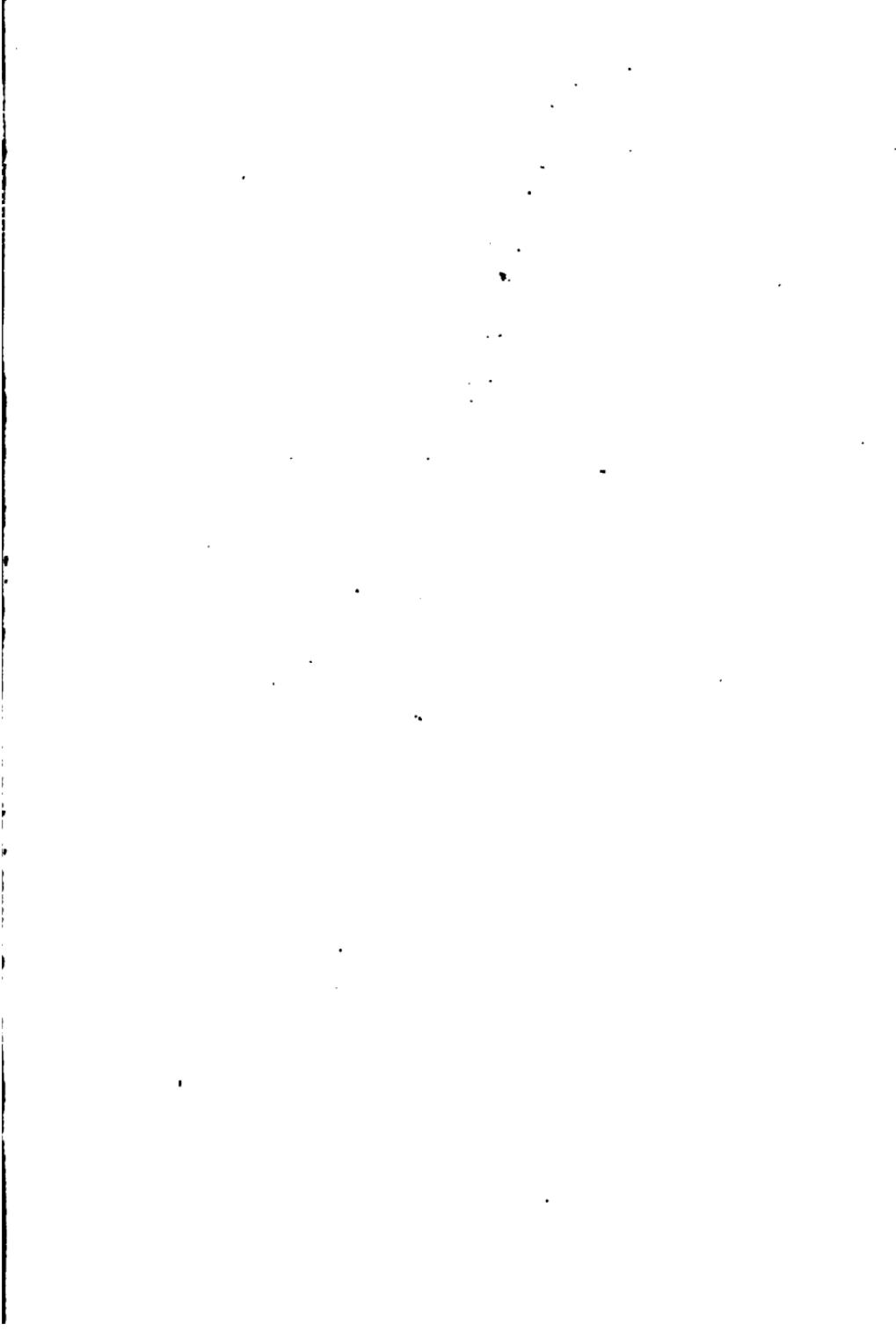
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